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ABSTRACT

This text, the second of two volumes that describe results of a 1988 study of mobile preschool units in New Zealand, presents a series of descriptive case studies of the nine mobile preschool units operating in New Zealand. A major purpose of the case studies is to show similarities of and differences between the units. Factors accounting for differences between units include the nature of the communities served, the extent of community interest in the units, and the number of children in the units. The profiles typically describe: (1) the background of the unit; (2) needs and characteristics of the communities served; (3) the role of parents; (4) the population of children and parents served; (5) the unit's equipment and facilities; (6) the unit's weekly venue; and (7) activities in the sessions held in the unit. (BC)

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MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNITS IN NEW ZEALAND

(Volume II - A Series of Case Studies)

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Research & Statistics Division
Ministry of Education
Wellington
April, 1991

Disclaimer:

Opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily coincide with those of the Ministry.

DEDICATION

This volume is dedicated not only to the mobile pre-school unit teachers who participated in our study, but to all early childhood (education) workers who work so hard to create positive, happy learning environments for children and their parents. It is also dedicated to parents, whose efforts contribute such a lot to the successful functioning of mobile units and to that of many other early childhood (education) programmes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all the people who have made this report possible. First and foremost, our gratitude goes to the mobile pre-school unit teachers who worked so hard for us by filling out questionnaires and forms, gave time to talk to us during a quite lengthy interview, and who tolerated us for so many days (under what cannot have been very easy circumstances for them) while we carried out the fieldwork for the study. We very much appreciate their help and cooperation.

As well, we would like to thank: the many parents who contributed to the survey by completing questionnaires and talking informally to us during our visits to the mobile units; members of the advisory committee for their helpful comments and advice; and to all the others (local kindergarten associations, the YWCA, senior teachers, and District Officers - Early Childhood Education) who made time to participate in the study.

Our thanks also go to Neil Leckie, Director of the Early Childhood Education Division of the Department of Education when mobile pre-school units came into existence, for providing us with valuable information on the (early) history of mobile pre-school units in New Zealand.

Within the Research and Statistics Division we would like to thank Ngaire Bennie for all her support, Mary Donn and Kathleen Murrow for their help with proofreading and editing, and Katrina Smith for her patience and effort in the typing of a series of drafts and the final manuscript. Thanks go, too, to others in the Division who helped in various ways.

Finally, we would like to thank Fiona Esau of the Learning Media Division (Ministry of Education) for producing the maps and for designing the cover.

Cover photographs by Evelyn Henry

'MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNITS IN NEW ZEALAND': A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE REPORT

Background

Mobile pre-school units were developed in the 1970s in response to concerns expressed about the adequacy of provision for early childhood education in isolated rural (and sometimes urban) areas. There are currently nine mobile pre-school units (under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education) operating throughout New Zealand. Eight of these are recognised as free kindergartens while the ninth is administered jointly by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), its local kindergarten association, and the Ministry. A mobile pre-school unit comprises two trained kindergarten teachers who travel with equipment, in a van which is provided, from a base location to several different communities each week and run a kindergarten programme for children (and their parents) in each of the places visited.

A study of the mobile pre-school units was requested by the former Department of Education's[1] Early Childhood Education Division. The purpose of the study was to obtain comprehensive and up-to-date information about the units because, at the time the study was commissioned, consideration was being given to extending the service but no evaluation of their operation or impact had ever been undertaken.

Methods

A case study approach, whereby each of the mobile units was visited for a period of five (or, in the case of the YWCA unit, nine) working days, was adopted. During the fieldwork period at each mobile unit, formal - as well as more informal - observations of teacher-child and teacher-parent interactions were carried out; information was also gathered on such matters as the nature of the programmes run by the units, the number of groups visited each week, travelling time, accommodation available to groups, and length of sessions. In addition to the observations, interviews with teachers were conducted, and parents, mobile unit management committees, and early childhood education individuals and groups (eg senior teachers and kindergarten association staff) were surveyed by means of questionnaires.

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[1] The Department of Education became the Ministry of Education on 1 October 1989.

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Organisation of the Report

The report on the study has been divided into two volumes: Volume I contains more 'formal' data based on all nine mobile pre-school units while Volume II contains a series of (illustrated) case studies, one for each mobile pre-school unit in New Zealand.

The chapters contained in Volume I discuss, in turn, data on the mobile units obtained by means of the teacher interviews, teacher observations, and the questionnaires for parents, parent committees, and others. The final chapter presents a summary and analysis of the main findings (these are outlined below) and provides suggestions for how the report may be used.

The case studies contained in the second volume are almost wholly descriptive: each contains a brief historical background, followed by an account of the mobile unit's most salient features - for example, the number of groups visited, the number of children, and parents, who attended on a regular basis, the nature of the communities being served, the philosophy of the unit with respect to children and parents, the distance travelled by the teachers each week and time spent in travelling, length of sessions (including time taken to unpack and repack equipment at the beginning and end of each session), and so on. In addition, from information gathered during the observation periods at each mobile unit, the case studies include a description of all sessions attended by the researchers (covering, for instance, the range of equipment made available to the children and the sorts of activities they took part in, the structure of the session - ie whether it was mainly free play or a combination of free play and small and large group work, and the nature and extent of parental involvement during sessions). The facilities available for each group visited by a mobile pre-school unit to meet in are also described.

Findings of the Study (Volume I)

The following is an outline of some of the major results of the study as presented in Volume I of the report:

- The mobile pre-school units have had an impact on a large number of families throughout New Zealand.

- There is a continuing demand for (more) early childhood education services in the areas served by the mobile units.

- While all but one of the units is classified as a free kindergarten and therefore subject to the same rules and regulations as standard kindergartens, data suggest that guidelines drawn up specifically for mobile pre-school units may make them even more effective.

- While respondents to the various questionnaires used in the study felt that mobile pre-school units in general provided 'good' learning experiences for children, there was considerable concern expressed at the infrequency with which mobile units were able to visit groups. Respondents from rural areas believed that children attending the units were considerably disadvantaged, when compared to their counterparts in towns and cities, because of this. (Respondents associated with the urban-based unit expressed similar views; this was because they lived in communities with comparatively few services.)

- Infrequency of visits by the units was, however, offset to a considerable extent by the relatively small size of many of the groups visited by the units. This allowed a high level of intensive teacher-child (and teacher-parent) contact, not usually found in a 'conventional' kindergarten setting.

- Despite the strong wish of parents and teachers (and others) for mobile units to visit groups more often, there was little evidence that parents ran sessions themselves on days when the units did not visit. This suggests a possible area for development in the way the units operate if discrepancies between the provision of pre-school education in isolated areas and that in other parts of New Zealand are to be minimised.

- Although teachers who took part in the study were very positive about their positions as mobile pre-school unit teachers, they indicated that potential appointees needed to have special skills and qualities (eg a high level of flexibility, the ability to interact with a wide range of parents as well as children, and the ability to tolerate the frustrations of limited availability of equipment at given sessions, limited time, and variable conditions to run sessions) to equip them for the job.

- There was a wealth of data to suggest that many parents (especially those in the most isolated areas) gained as much as, if not more than, their children from their association with a mobile pre-school unit.

- Finally, the study clearly indicated that the service provided by mobile pre-school units was highly valued by the communities which received it, and that, although certain changes or modifications were desired, the perception was that any reduction of the service would be a major setback for the communities concerned.

The Case Studies (Volume II)

A major purpose of the case studies presented in Volume II was to try and show not only the similarities but also the differences between the mobile pre-school units - differences which, although to some extent were obviously influenced by teacher characteristics (teaching style, personality, etc) cannot entirely be explained in that way. Other important variables for explaining differences seemed to be, for example, the nature of the communities (eg their relative isolation, the socio-economic and/or cultural mix of the population) in which individual groups were based, the extent of community interest in and involvement with the mobile unit, the nature and extent of parental involvement in the pre-school programme and in the running and organisation of the mobile unit, the nature of the accommodation available for groups to meet in, the frequency with which groups could be visited, the distance that teachers from each mobile unit had to travel in the course of a week, and the number and age range of the children who attended groups.

Use of the Case Studies

Although the descriptions provided in the case studies represent the mobile units as they were at a specific period (1988), it is believed that - despite undoubted changes in certain particulars - the account of what occurs in the course of ordinary sessions held by mobile pre-school units is essentially as valid and pertinent now as it was when the fieldwork was carried out. Further, it is also believed that the account captures, at least in spirit, the sort of work carried out by many others who work in early childhood centres of all types throughout New Zealand. It is hoped, therefore, that the intention of the case studies - that is, to provide an insight into what happens at mobile units (and, in the broader view, early childhood centres in general) which is both interesting and informative - has been fulfilled.

Copies of the full report ***'Mobile Pre-School Units in New Zealand'*** *(Vols I and II) by Shelley Kennedy, Brenda Ratcliff and Evelyn Henry may be obtained (free of charge) from the Research and Statistics Division, Ministry of Education, P O Box 1666, Wellington, New Zealand.*

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PHOTOGRAPHIC CREDITS

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Case Study 1: YWCA MPSU (photographs by B Ratcliff and E Henry); Case Study 2: Franklin MPSU (E Henry); Case Study 3: Clevedon MPSU (E Henry); Case Study 4: Thames MPSU (S Kennedy); Case Study 5: Lakeland MPSU (S Kennedy); Case Study 6: Hunterville MPSU (E Henry); Case Study 7: Marlborough MPSU (S Kennedy); Case Study 8: Waimate MPSU (S Kennedy); Case Study 9: Southland MPSU (S Kennedy)

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Background

Mobile pre-school units were developed in the 1970s in response to concerns expressed about the adequacy of early childhood education provisions in isolated rural (and sometimes urban) areas. There are currently nine mobile pre-school units (under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education) operating throughout New Zealand. Eight of these are recognised as free kindergartens while the ninth is administered jointly by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), its local kindergarten association, and the ministry. A mobile pre-school unit comprises two trained kindergarten teachers who travel with equipment, in a van which is provided, from a base location to several different communities each week and run a kindergarten programme for children (and parents) in each of the places visited.

The Research and Statistics Division was requested to undertake the study of mobile pre-school units by the former Department of Education's Early Childhood Education Division. The purpose of the study was to obtain comprehensive and up-to-date information about the units because, at the time the study was commissioned, consideration was being given to extending the service but no evaluation of their operation or impact had ever been undertaken.

Methods

The study adopted a case study approach whereby each of the mobile units was visited for a period of five (or, in the case of the YWCA unit, nine) working days. During the fieldwork period at each mobile unit, formal - as well as more informal - observations of teacher-child and teacher-parent interactions were carried out; the researchers also gathered information on the nature of the programmes run by the units, the number of groups visited each week, travelling time, accommodation available to groups, length of sessions, etc. In addition to the observations, interviews with teachers were conducted, and parents, mobile unit management committees, and early childhood education individuals/groups (such as senior teachers, kindergarten associations, district officers - early childhood education) were surveyed by means of questionnaires.

Organisation of the Report

The report has been divided into two volumes: Volume I contains more 'formal' data based on all nine mobile pre-school units while this volume (Vol. II) contains a series of (illustrated) case studies, one for each mobile pre-school unit in New Zealand.

The chapters contained in Volume I discuss, in turn, data on the mobile units obtained by means of the teacher interviews, teacher observations, and the questionnaires for parents, parent committees, and others. The final chapter presents a summary and analysis of the main findings (these are outlined below) and provides suggestions for how the report may be used.

The case studies contained in the present volume are almost wholly descriptive: each contains a brief historical background (based on information from former Department of Education files), followed by an account of the mobile unit's most salient features - for example, the number of groups visited, the number of children, and parents, who attended on a regular basis, the nature of the communities being served, the philosophy of the unit with respect to children and parents, the distance travelled by the teachers each week and time spent in travelling, length of sessions (including time taken to unpack and repack equipment at the beginning and end of each session), and so on. In addition, from information gathered during the observation periods at each mobile unit, the case studies include a description of all sessions attended by the researchers (covering, for instance, the range of equipment made available to the children and the sorts of activities which they took part in, the structure of the session - ie whether it was mainly free play or a combination of free play and small and large group work, and the nature and extent of parental involvement during sessions). The facilities available for each group visited by a mobile pre-school unit to meet in are also described.

Findings of the Study (Volume I)

The following is an outline of some of the major results of the study as presented in Volume I of this report:

- The mobile pre-school units have had an impact on a large number of families throughout New Zealand.

- There is a continuing demand for (more) early childhood education services in the areas served by the mobile units.

- While all but one of the units is classified as a free kindergarten and therefore subject to the same rules and regulations, data suggest that specific guidelines for mobile pre-school units may make them even more effective.

- While respondents to the various questionnaire surveys felt that mobile pre-school units in general provided 'good' learning experiences for children, there was considerable concern expressed at the infrequency with which mobile units were able to visit groups. Respondents believed that children attending the units were considerably disadvantaged, when compared to their counterparts in towns and cities, because of this.

- Infrequency of visits by the units was, however, offset to a considerable extent by the relatively small size of many of the groups visited by the units. This allowed a high level of intensive teacher-child (and teacher-parent) contact, not usually found in a 'conventional' kindergarten setting.

- Despite the strong wish of parents and teachers (and others) for mobile units to visit groups more often, there was little evidence that parents ran sessions themselves on days when the units did not visit. This suggests a possible area for development in the way the units operate if discrepancies between the provision of pre-school education in isolated areas and that in other parts of New Zealand are to be minimised.

- Although teachers who took part in the study were very positive about their positions as mobile pre-school unit teachers, they indicated that potential appointees needed to have special skills and qualities (eg flexibility, the ability to interact with a wide range of parents as well as children, and the ability to tolerate the frustrations of limited availability of equipment at given sessions, limited time, and variable conditions to run sessions) to equip them for the job.

- There was a wealth of data to suggest that many parents (especially those in more isolated areas) gained as much as, if not more than, their children from their association with a mobile pre-school unit.

- Finally, the study clearly indicated that the service provided by mobile pre-school units was highly valued by the communities which received it, and that, although certain changes or modifications were desired, the perception was that any reduction of the service would be a major setback for the communities concerned.

The Case Studies (Volume II)

A major purpose of the case studies contained in the present volume was to try and show not only the similarities but also the differences between the mobile pre-school units - differences which, although to some extent were obviously influenced by teacher characteristics (teaching style, personality, etc), cannot entirely be explained in that way. Other important variables for explaining differences seemed to be, for example, the nature of the communities in which individual groups were based (ie their relative isolation, the socio-economic and/or cultural mix of the population), the extent of community interest in and involvement with the mobile unit, the nature and extent of parental involvement in the pre-school programme and in the running and organisation of the mobile unit, the nature of the accommodation available for groups to meet in, the frequency with which groups could be visited, the distance that teachers on each mobile unit had to travel in the course of a week, and the number and age range of the children who attended groups.

Use of the Case Studies

Although the descriptions provided in the case studies represent the mobile units as they were at a specific period (1988), it is believed that - despite undoubted changes in certain particulars - the account of what occurs in the course of ordinary sessions held by mobile pre-school units is essentially as valid and pertinent now as it was when the fieldwork was carried out. Further, it is also believed that the account captures - at least in spirit - the sort of work carried out by many others who work in early childhood (education) centres of all types throughout New Zealand. It is hoped, therefore, that the intention of the case studies - ie to provide an insight into what happens at mobile units (and, in the broader view, early childhood centres in general) which is both interesting and informative - has been fulfilled.

THE YWCA MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT, WEST AUCKLAND

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THE YWCA MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT, WEST AUCKLAND

Introduction

The YWCA mobile pre-school unit, which began in 1977, serves communities in the West Auckland area. The mobile unit has its administrative base in the West Auckland Women's Centre in Te Atatu South and from there, the staff of two trained kindergarten teachers travel to groups located at Piha in the West, and Herald Island and Whenuapai in the north. They also attend groups in the suburbs of Massey and Henderson. The YWCA mobile unit is run jointly by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), the Ministry of Education, and the Auckland Kindergarten Association.

Background[1]

In 1977, the Auckland branch of the YWCA convened a committee to consider ways in which pre-school education could be brought to the residents of West Auckland. Its members were concerned at the lack of community facilities for the young families which made up most of the population of this area. West Auckland was a fast growing area, and it was considered likely that existing pre-school facilities would be unable to meet the needs of the growing population. Most families were either buying their first homes under the Housing Corporation loan scheme or living in state rental accommodation.

The transport system for West Auckland was (and still is) poor, making it very difficult, if not impossible, for many parents to make use of available pre-schools. The YWCA committee at that time, therefore, proposed that a mobile pre-school unit would be the best means of providing a 'neighbourhood' pre-school service for this area. The National Children's Health Research Foundation provided the YWCA with a grant of $13,885 for the purchase of a vehicle, its registration, insurance and running costs, and to buy an initial supply of play equipment for the mobile unit. The grant was spread over three years - 1977, 1978, 1979 - and was subject to the staff salaries being met from other sources. The then Department of Education agreed to pay the teachers' salaries. The unit was to be under the joint supervision of the YWCA, Auckland Kindergarten Association, and the Department of Education.

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[1] From Department of Education files.

YWCA Mobile Pre-School Unit

The aims and objectives of the unit at the time of its foundation were:

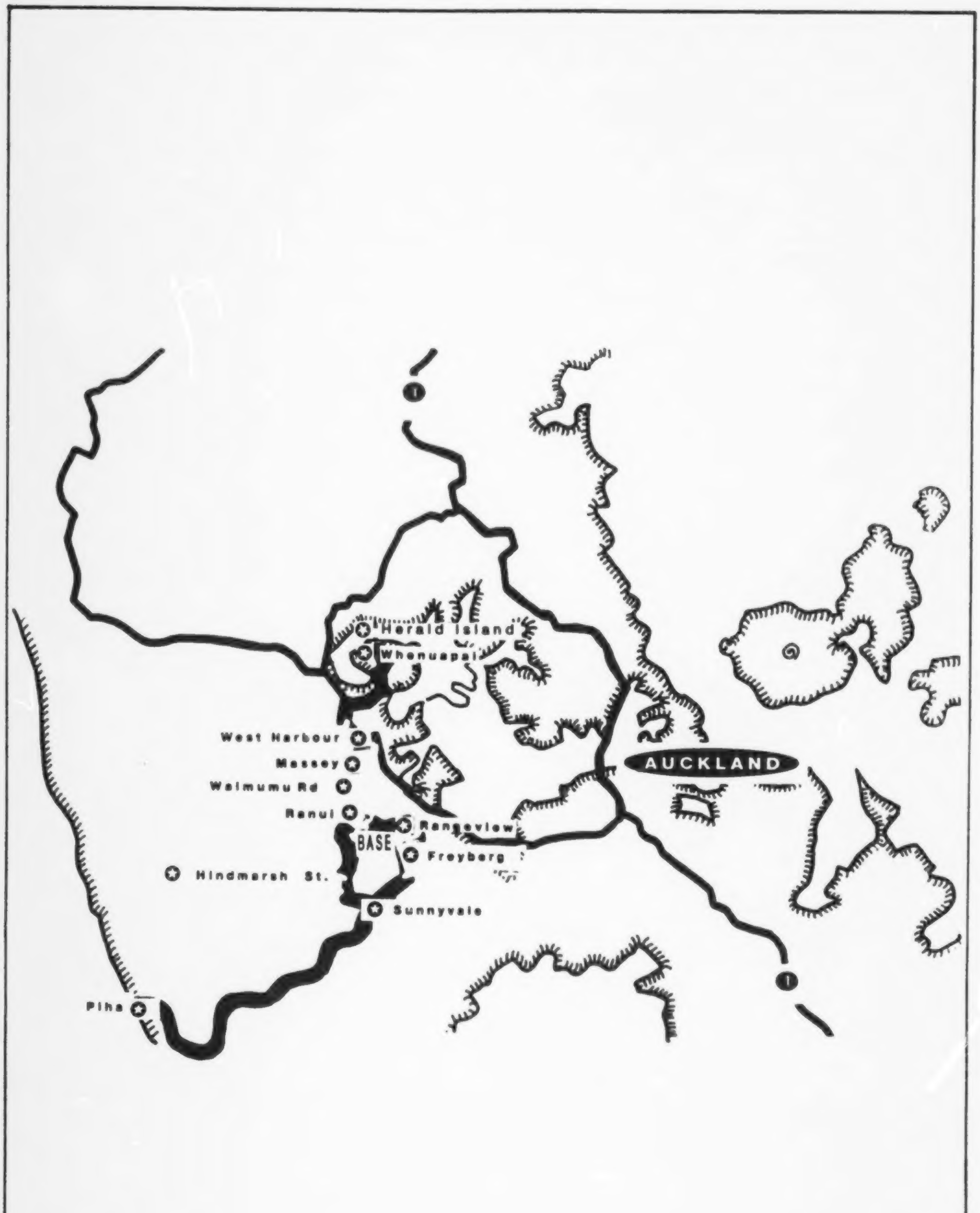
1 to establish small playgroups at suitable venues, and provide them with educational programmes (it was intended to encourage these playgroups to become self-sufficient while maintaining contact with the unit); and

2 to have teachers facilitate the integration of community services (such as health and welfare) with early childhood education. (It was expected at the time the unit was established that health and social workers would play an important part in putting families in touch with the mobile unit.)

At the time the fieldwork was carried out at this unit (April-May 1988), these basic aims were still evident - ie the focus of the teachers' work reflected the working philosophy of the YWCA of 'Empowering Women'. Thus, in an area with a high incidence of social problems, the teachers aimed primarily to support parents (often involving extensive contact with other community services and groups) which in turn benefited the children. Support included providing parent education programmes on child development and encouraging parents to plan stimulating play programmes, trips, and other activities for their children. The teachers acted as resource people, providing advice and supplying equipment as required for the parent-run sessions. Due to their being so busy with existing commitments, however, teachers stated that they were seldom able to be involved in the setting-up of new playgroups as had happened in the past but, instead, they mainly responded to requests for assistance from already established groups.

In an information sheet provided to parents, the teachers emphasised that an important goal for them as mobile pre-school unit staff was to promote "group liaison" (usually by means of camps and group outings) which they saw as a valuable opportunity for women to share ideas with one another and to experience fellowship. In the unit's pamphlet for parents (as at May 1988) it was stated that:

> **"During the course of a year the MPSU [mobile pre-school unit] tries to coordinate three camps for the women and children involved in the playgroups. Two of these are for women only, and the third a women and children's combined camp."**


Herald Island
Whenuapai
West Harbour
Massey
Waimumu Rd
Ranui
Rangeview
BASE
Freyberg
Hindmarsh St.
Sunnyvale
Piha
AUCKLAND
1
1

Scale 2cm = 5 kilometres

The women's camps were described as three-day (Friday to Sunday) events designed to give women "an opportunity... to develop their own potential in an accepting and relaxed environment." The combined women's and children's camps were scheduled over a five day period (Monday to Friday) and aimed to provide "a relaxed atmosphere for all involved." Separate adult and child programmes were run, with childcare provided. The combined camps were particularly directed at women who would not otherwise be able to leave their children in order to participate.

The YWCA Mobile Pre-School Unit's Itinerary

As at May 1988, the YWCA mobile pre-school unit visited 11 locations, mostly suburbs in the West Auckland (Massey/Henderson) area but a few more isolated, semi-rural areas as well - Piha, Whenuapai, and Herald Island. The map on the previous page shows the locations of the groups visited. Except for Massey and Piha, which were visited on alternate weeks, playgroups were usually attended by one or both of the teachers (depending on competing commitments, such as liaising with other community workers) on a weekly basis.

During their two-week itinerary, teachers sometimes attended groups separately (usually on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday mornings). On such occasions, one teacher would drop the other off before going on to her particular venue and then return later to collect her colleague. Table 1.1 shows the distances travelled and the time spent travelling by the YWCA mobile pre-school unit teachers over a one-week period. The teachers also pointed out that, as well as travelling to and from venues, they had to travel into town for administrative purposes and, on occasion, had to collect children and parents from their homes when going on organised trips. The total distance travelled, therefore, was sometimes greater than that recorded in Table 1.1 - perhaps up to a total of 250-300 kilometres.

Because of the number of groups receiving visits from the YWCA unit, and because of the other commitments arising from their role of providing support to parents, time spent by teachers at individual playgroup sessions usually ranged from between one-and-a-half to two hours. (Often, however, the largely parent-run sessions were already underway when the teachers arrived; sometimes they also continued after the teachers had left.) Table 1.2 shows the length of sessions and the times sessions began and ended during the fieldwork period at the YWCA unit. In addition, Table 1.3 gives the time (in minutes) taken to unpack and repack equipment at each venue.

Table 1.1 : Approximate distances travelled per week and the time spent travelling by the YWCA mobile pre-school unit teachers

	Base to morning destination and return			Base to afternoon destination and return				
	Morning destination	Distance travelled	Travelling time (mins)	Afternoon destination	Distance travelled	Travelling time (mins)	Total kilometres per day	Total travelling time per day (mins)
Monday	Ranui and Whenuapai	10 32	16 40	N/A - remain at base	0	0	10 32 Total 42	16 40 Total 56
Tuesday	Herald Island and Waimumu Rd	32 15	40 20	Hindmarsh St	10	12	42 15 Total 57	52 20 Total 72
Wednesday	Massey or Piha	15 74	20 90	N/A - remain at base	0	0	Total 15 or Total 74	20 90
Thursday	Rangeview and Freyberg	4 4	4 4	West Harbour	20	16	24 4 Total 28	20 4 Total 24
Friday	Sunnyvale	6	8	N/A - remain at base	0	0	6	8
						Weekly total: or	148 kilometres 207 kilometres	180 minutes or 259 minutes

Note: Alternative totals indicate differences in distance travelled in the first and second weeks of the mobile unit's two week itinerary.

YWCA Mobile Pre-School Unit

Table 1.2: Length of sessions and times sessions began and ended during the fieldwork period at the YWCA mobile pre-school unit

Name of group	Time session began[a]	Time session ended	Length of session[b]
Week 1			
Waimumu Road	10.00am	11.30am	1hr 30 minutes
Hindmarsh Street	1.28pm	3.00pm	1hr 32 minutes
Massey	10.15am	11.50am	1hr 35 minutes
Freyberg	9.45am	11.15am	1hr 30 minutes
Joint West Harbour/ Massey trip	1.15pm	2.45pm	1hr 30 minutes
Sunnyvale	10.15am	12.00pm	1hr 45 minutes
Week 2			
Ranui	9.58am	11.25am	1hr 27 minutes
Herald Island	10.17am	11.38am	1hr 21 minutes
Hindmarsh Street[c]	-	-	-
Piha	10.23am	11.40am	1hr 27 minutes
Rangeview	9.50am	11.29am	1hr 39 minutes
West Harbour	12.45pm	2.42pm	1hr 57 minutes
Sunnyvale	10.00am	12.15pm	2hrs 15 minutes

[a] This refers to the time the session was sufficiently underway to enable children and parents to participate in activities. Sometimes, unpacking and setting out equipment was not fully completed but this did not interrupt the session.

[b] Includes time taken to tidy up and pack some equipment before the end of the session (usually with parents, children and teachers all involved to some extent at different stages).

[c] Exact times were not recorded as the group went on an outing during this session. The approximate length of the outing was 2 hours.

Table 1.3: Time (in minutes) taken to unpack and pack up equipment at each session during the fieldwork period

Name of group	Time taken to unpack[a]	Time taken to pack equipment and tidy up[b]
Week 1		
Waimumu Road	13	20
Hindmarsh Street	9	10
Massey	17	30
Freyberg	15	25
Joint West Harbour/Massey trip	4	4
Sunnyvale	9	25
Week 2		
Ranui	16	10
Herald Island	26	18
Hindmarsh Street	n/a[c]	n/a
Piha	13	14
Rangeview	19	24
West Harbour	8	14
Sunnyvale	n/a[c]	n/a

[a] Includes time spent before and after sessions began. Unpacking completed after the beginning of a session did not interrupt the flow of activities.

[b] Includes time spent both during and after sessions ended. Packing up and tidying up usually involved children as well as parents and this became part of the general activities rather than signalling the end of a session.

[c] As these groups went on outings during session times there was no unpacking or packing up of equipment required.

Communities Served by the YWCA Mobile Pre-School Unit

When asked about the 11 different communities that they served, the teachers described the majority of the people they worked with as:

> ***"Young families who are struggling to pay off a mortgage. But the nature of what the mobile unit is means that they are one-income families, or that extra income is [earned] in part-time hours, and that in itself puts quite a strain on the families."***

YWCA Mobile Pre-School Unit

The head teacher further stated:

> ***"When I first came to work in West Auckland, I thought that West Aucklanders were a breed apart from people that I have met before. Their attitudes to life are quite different from others of the city. This is very generally speaking. Their aspirations in life are very much survival oriented, they are different in a way - a lot more real, and that doesn't apply so much to the isolated groups that we talked about, but the suburban [groups] certainly."***

Although the teachers stated that there were several types of paid employment represented amongst their different families - including cleaning, factory work, trades, and the professions - many of the (high-density housing) communities served by the YWCA mobile unit also had high unemployment.

When describing salient features (in terms of the work of the mobile pre-school unit) of the communities they visited, the teachers mentioned that many parents in the widely dispersed Massey area were unable to attend playgroups (at least, not regularly) due to the inadequacy of the transport system and the distances being too great to walk. West Auckland was also reported to have high Maori and Pacific Islands populations although the head teacher stated that these cultural groups were "under represented in the work we do".

Piha, a seaside community in West Auckland, was one of the more distant venues visited by the mobile unit. The very successful playgroup there, run by the parents and supported by the unit, was the only early childhood education programme provided in that area. The teachers commented on the relative isolation of the community: "We are their link to society I suppose, so it's really important that we keep going out there."

Specific Needs and Problems of Different Communities which Affected the Way Teachers Worked with Playgroups

For most of the Pacific Islands families involved with the YWCA mobile pre-school unit English was a second language. The head teacher commented:

> ***"We have two groups where English is a second language for the majority of the families that support our group, so the work we do with the children is very basic. I actually really enjoy working with those few children, because that's what I've had a lot of experience with."***

Many of these families, and others which formed the communities of West Auckland, suffered from what the head teacher referred to as "isolation within suburbia". She called the transport facilities for this area "pitiful", making travelling difficult, especially as a lot of families were unable to afford cars. The lack of community services and recreational facilities for young families led to feelings of isolation and lack of confidence in several aspects of these people's lives, one of which was parenting skills. The teachers attempted to reassure parents and discuss their problems and insecurities; teachers' response to parents took up a large part of the time they spent with the playgroups.

The second teacher described the needs, as she saw them, of the communities serviced by the mobile pre-school in the following way:

> ***"There is a need for us to be there and to believe in the people that we see, and to believe in what they are doing ... and to get the parents to believe in themselves ... that is what is really important in their life. And just to be there, and just to listen to their problems, and have them know that we go there and are trying to help their children, although that is extremely difficult."***

The teachers summed up their feelings about the needs of the different communities served by the mobile unit by stating simply:

> ***"Every area brings different problems."***

Particular Events or Characteristics Associated with the Different Communities which Could Disrupt Sessions

The teachers stated that parents' "personal problems" could sometimes disrupt sessions. Also, they reported that personality differences amongst parents who ran one particular playgroup had led to some mothers leaving the group. The teachers felt this was particularly unfortunate as the parents who left were the ones they thought would benefit most from attending.

The weather was mentioned as having an effect on groups whose members did not have cars: rate of attendance fell on rainy days when parents were less inclined to walk to sessions.

Finally, Pacific Islands church functions were reported to disrupt sessions from time to time as the children did not attend when preparations for these events were underway. The head teacher commented that:

> ***"It isn't that the parents don't have time to bring them, it's that the inclination to take them isn't there. The value isn't the same because children are the lowest in the pecking order in Pacific Island families, and so their needs get met last. The effect of that is just that you often have small groups, and that's fine by me. I mean, I like***

> ***working with small groups, there is more time for people then. Because we do only have a maximum of two hours per session with any group, and if you have less people to share yourself amongst, that's fine."***

The Role of the Parents

Parents were an essential part of the YWCA mobile unit as they were almost entirely responsible for running their own playgroups. Unlike at the other mobile pre-school units, the YWCA unit teachers acted less as group leaders and more as facilitators by providing guidance to parents and by supplying and/or supplementing equipment for the programmes being run. The teachers also took a lesser role in supervising the children as most parents (often up to 95%) stayed for the duration of sessions and were able to look after their own children. (When compared with 'conventional' kindergartens, therefore, the percentage of parents who tended to remain throughout sessions was large.) The teachers stated that of those parents who remained during sessions at the different groups visited, between 50% and 80% actively involved themselves in the programme. A parent roster system also operated for each group (ie one or two parents took turns each week to set out equipment, prepare morning tea, etc) but many parents regularly helped even when not on duty. Tables 1.4 and 1.5 show the number of parents present at each group during the fieldwork period and in a subsequent week.

YWCA Mobile Pre-School Unit

Table 1.4: Number of parents present at each session visited by the YWCA mobile unit during the fieldwork period

Name of group	Number of parents present for all or most of session[a]
Week 1	
Waimumu Road	12
Hindmarsh Street	3
Massey	5
Freyberg	9
Joint West Harbour/Massey trip	2
Sunnyvale	8
Week 2	
Ranui	7
Herald Island	10
Hindmarsh Street	5
Piha	14
Rangeview	8
West Harbour	8
Sunnyvale	not recorded

[a] Almost always, parents who remained for all or most of the session had some input into the playgroup, whether it was helping to unpack or tidy up, supervising or working with their own or other people's children, observing children/teachers at work, or spending time interacting with other parents or with the teachers.

Table 1.5: Number of parents present (as reported by teachers) at sessions visited by the YWCA mobile pre-school unit during the period 14 to 21 July, 1988

Name of group/day	Number of parents present all or most of session
Monday	
Whenuapai	18
Ranui	17
Tuesday	
Waimumu Road	9
Herald Island	13
Hindmarsh Street	2
Wednesday	
Piha	21
Thursday[a]	
Rangeview	17
West Harbour	4
Friday	
Sunnyvale	11

[a] Figures are not available for the Massey playgroup, held on a Thursday, as the teachers did not visit this group during the stated period.

The YWCA Mobile Pre-School Unit Teachers' Involvement in Community Networks

The YWCA mobile pre-school unit teachers were often approached to support other early childhood education workers and parents who wished to set up or improve their own (mostly part-time) groups in the general West Auckland area, but they felt they were already over-committed with their own playgroups. However, the teachers endeavoured to visit at least some of the other playgroups once a term to "see how things are going and offer advice if they need it".

The teachers stated that there were "too many pre-school and childcare groups [in the area] to liaise with, but we know where they all are". The majority of children attending the YWCA mobile unit sessions were, according to the teachers, also enrolled on other early childhood education group registers. However, the teachers further reported that "on playgroup day they all come to playgroup rather than go to [a conventional] kindergarten, mainly for the mother's benefit".

As well as meeting on an occasional basis with people who ran other playgroups, the teachers also visited children in foster care. Teachers were asked, too, to attend or speak at Parent Centre meetings, and to run (without pay) seminar workshops for Plunket mothers' groups.

As part of the unit's policy of 'Empowering Women' by giving support and guidance, teachers liaised at least once a week with the Department of Social Welfare, with education officers from the Department of Education, and with Plunket and public health nurses.

The head teacher summed up her feelings about the importance of 'ongoing networking' with other related professionals in her work as a YWCA mobile pre-school unit teacher:

> ***"Every time I go and visit a headmaster on behalf of the playgroup, that is having an influence on children's lives. Every time someone is having real difficulty, and I go and talk to someone at the Social Welfare that I know and see whether they can in fact do anything from their end, that is an important step. Yes, affecting the parents' lives affects the children's as far as I can see, and that's what we are about."***

The Children

There was a wide age range of children attending the YWCA mobile unit. Unlike the other mobile units which, although they allowed very young children to attend sessions under the supervision of a parent or other adult, did not officially enrol such children, the YWCA unit enrolled all pre-schoolers as soon as they began attending, irrespective of age, hence the YWCA register listed children anywhere from a few weeks old up to 5 years of age (or occasionally a little older).

The YWCA mobile unit also did not operate a waiting list system, as all the playgroups were parent-initiated. The head teacher stated in the interview that:

> ***"No, we don't work a list system because it isn't us who are initiating the groups. There is a parent cooperative and my attitude is that everybody who comes is on the roll, and I work with the mothers right down to the newborn babies so that there isn't a waiting list because everyone is on the roll."***

The teachers' policy as regards children reflected the YWCA unit's overall philosophy towards women - ie that it was of primary importance to get the women to attend sessions in order to meet with one another and to gain confidence in working with their children, which then had benefits for the children themselves. After a period of attending the mobile pre-school unit, it was not uncommon for parents of older children, previously not confident enough to cope with more 'conventional' forms of pre-school, to take their children to a kindergarten or playcentre.

Table 1.6 shows the number of children present at sessions observed during the fieldwork period while Table 1.7 records the number (and age range) of children present at sessions some weeks later - as reported by the teachers.

YWCA Mobile Pre-School Unit

Table 1.6: Number of children present at each session observed[a] during the fieldwork period at the YWCA mobile pre-school unit

Name of group/time	Enrolled children	Non-enrolled children[b]	Total number present
Week 1			
Waimumu Road (Tuesday am)	17	-	17
Hindmarsh Street (Tuesday am)	9	2	11
Massey (Wednesday am)	6	1	7
Freyberg (Thursday am)	11	1	12
Joint session for the West Harbour and Massey groups (Thursday pm)	3	-	3
Sunnyvale (Friday am)	13	-	13
Week 2			
Ranui (Monday am)	8	1	9
Herald Island (Tuesday am)	15	1	16
Hindmarsh Street (Tuesday pm)	8	-	8
Piha (Wednesday am)	15	-	15
Rangeview (Thursday am)	16	5	21
West Harbour (Thursday pm)	6	2	8
Sunnyvale (Friday am)	not recorded	not recorded	not recorded

[a] The researcher was unable to observe at all sessions due to a public holiday on the Monday of the first week and also because two sessions were often scheduled at the same time which meant that each teacher went to a different group during the same time period.

[b] These were either temporary visitors or new-comers to the group who had not yet been enrolled, rather than children normally considered too young to be 'officially' enrolled (ie children under $2^1/_2$ to 3 years). The YWCA unit differed from the other mobile pre-school units in that it registered on its rolls all pre-school children who attended fairly regularly no matter how young they were.

Table 1.7: Number and age range of children present (as reported by teachers) at sessions during the period 14 to 21 July 1988, plus total number of families enrolled in each group

Name of group	Number of children present	Age range of children present				Total number of families enrolled in each group
		From		To		
		Years	Months	Years	Months	
Monday						
Whenuapai	21	0	4	5	0	30
Ranui	12	1	2	4	0	15
Tuesday						
Waimumu Road	11	0	3	4	4	15
Herald Island	17	0	1	4	11	26
Hindmarsh Street	3	1	3	4	3	9
Wednesday						
Piha	26	0	8	4	8	31
Thursday[a]						
Rangeview	22	0	2	4	6	52
West Harbour	7	1	6	4	10	10
Friday						
Sunnyvale	15	0	3	4	7	42

[a] Figures are not available for the Massey playgroup, held on a Thursday, as the teachers did not visit this group during the stated period.

Administration

In order that teachers could carry out their administrative and planning tasks, the YWCA mobile pre-school unit rented a small office in the West Auckland Women's Centre. This centre was an old house; the unit's office was the sunroom at the front of the building. The teachers were able to use the Women's Centre facilities, for example, their answer-phone and telephone extension, kitchen and toilet. Equipment for use at sessions was stored in a shed at the back of the property. (Up until two months prior to the data collection, equipment had been stored in the office as the shed had not yet been built. The 'open door' policy at the Women's Centre meant that teachers had not been able to put away equipment, the intention being that mothers and children should feel welcome. This was stressful for teachers and made administration difficult as equipment was often left out by other users of the Centre, leaving the office very untidy. The situation appeared to have improved greatly with the availability of the storage shed.)

Children attending a session at the YWCA mobile pre-school unit

At the time the researchers visited, the teachers were facing another difficulty, this arising from the Women's Centre holding meetings at the same time as the mobile unit's Monday and Wednesday afternoon administration times. Because the Centre meetings were held in the room that provided access to the kitchen and toilet from the sunroom the mobile unit teachers were unable to use all their facilities during planning times.

The teachers also found that they did not have enough time in which to carry out their administrative duties. There appeared to be difficulties (according to the teachers) arising from dual supervision of the unit by the then Department of Education and the YWCA. The second teacher stated that "we don't know who our bosses are". She explained further:

> ***"We have just been told that we aren't meant to be doing the typing of our newsletters, we can hand that over to the Administrative Director at the YWCA. But you sort of take it in there, and she says "I don't have to do this for you", and it's just because they have never done it before."***

Typing and photocopying of newsletters were given to the YWCA office as teachers felt that with 260 children on their rolls it was just not effective use of their time "to spend hours at the photocopier". As the YWCA office also wrote letters on behalf of the mobile pre-school unit, it was necessary for the teachers to communicate their wishes to the YWCA office staff so that these could be incorporated in any letters written. The head teacher felt that it was important to be an effective communicator:

> ***"I don't know whether you call communication administration, but communication in this job is very important, but because there are so many people to communicate to, the time involved is long as well."***

Transportation and Equipment

The teachers used a Toyota Corolla stationwagon to transport themselves and their equipment to and from venues. The car was not garaged, but was parked off the road behind the West Auckland Women's Centre. The teachers shared the car between them even though they sometimes attended different sessions. The teachers also used the car when visiting their local kindergarten association or the YWCA in Auckland city. (The vehicle had previously been used to transport small groups of children and adults on organised trips or outings as well, until the Waitemata City Council had made a van available for such purposes.)

The mobile unit had an account at a local petrol station which was paid by the YWCA. The teachers were required to complete a 'running sheet', recording the amount of petrol purchased, and the odometer reading on the day petrol was bought. Simple service checks had to be completed in either a morning or an afternoon, as the teachers could not spare the car for an entire day. More complicated maintenance requiring the vehicle to be off the road for more than half a day was carried out during term holidays.

For the sessions that they attended separately, the teachers either had to share equipment or to carry two quite independent sets of materials in the stationwagon. Storing sufficient equipment at each location would not have been feasible, according to the head teacher, who stated that, in any case, they did not have enough resources to give out on a long-term basis to 11 different groups.

The teachers made the following comments concerning equipment and its transportation to the different playgroups attended by the unit:

> ***"We have our store, they [the playgroups] have their equipment and we leave them some, but our larger groups we encourage them to buy their own equipment if they meet more than once a week. But I don't believe that it's worth all the money and effort fundraising to buy things that are used once a week and that are left in a community facility for other people to use. There is too much heartache that goes into it, and often it gets used more if we buy that expensive item and bring it with us."***
>
> ***"We take the bulk of the equipment, [but] we try to make it look like we try to use their equipment [too] so they realise there is a need for them to have that equipment."***

Some resources that teachers would like to have used with their groups, however, were too heavy or bulky to transport by car. This especially applied to outdoor equipment and other items which groups either could not afford to buy themselves and/or were unable to store between sessions. (Some groups visited by the mobile unit had outdoor equipment that was recognised by other community users as belonging specifically to that playgroup, but other groups were only able to use communal equipment and not leave anything stored at the venue. Often, too, groups were unable to take advantage of outdoor areas or facilities because available fencing was not adequate enough to keep younger children from running onto the road or other out-of-bounds areas. Such limitations caused frustrations for teachers and parents alike.)

The teachers stated that the stationwagon available to them had several disadvantages as a means of transporting equipment and materials to venues and that a van would be preferable:

> ***"It would be a lot easier if we had our own van. We would be able to carry a lot more equipment, because we are restricted with the amount that we can carry only having a stationwagon. And just the fact that our car is in a terrible state, I mean we get wet feet when we are driving in the rain because it has got holes in the floor, and so we joke about having to wear gumboots in the rain to drive the car."***

The head teacher had been asking the YWCA for a van ever since she had been in the job, which was more than a year. According to the head teacher, the YWCA had been unable to get sponsorship for the van, and would therefore have to pay for it themselves, and that was why the decision to purchase had not been made. Both teachers expressed frustration that a van had not been forthcoming, for example:

> ***"They can't afford to buy us a new one [van], but it is something that they are working on at the moment. But I mean, to me, that is high priority, because we shouldn't have to put up with driving an old car when all the other employees of the YWCA use flash new stationwagons etc, just to go to and from work everyday. It is quite disheartening, because we use ours all day, every day."***

The teachers also felt that if they had a van they would be able to provide more exciting sessions for children and parents in terms of bringing a wider variety of equipment, and they would be able to take the groups on trips more frequently and more easily in a van:

> ***"I would like to keep more materials in a van, rather than to keep them in the shed, because in that way you are limited in spontaneity - if you are at a group session and something comes up and you have got the perfect resources but they are sitting twenty miles away, then you are a bit limited. I would [also] like to have a van so that we could in fact have more group outings that are done on a spontaneous basis."***

They also felt that a second vehicle would significantly help them in the course of their work:

> ***"A car is not suitable for a mobile unit, and it would be really nice to have two - even a van and a car, just because the fact that we do go to groups separately. Either one of us has to sit on a step for the other one to finish the session, or we use our own car, or we get parents to drive us home, which is not always feasible, especially with my Ranui group. It's quite a way, and none of the parents there drive, so I sit on the doorstep for anything up to an hour for [the head teacher] to come and pick me up. I don't really see why I should have to use my own car."***

Teachers' Account of what a 'Typical' Day/Week was Like for Them on the YWCA Mobile Pre-School Unit

Each working day, the teachers arrived at their base at the West Auckland Women's Centre at 8.30am.

There was usually an hour between starting work and leaving for the morning session, and teachers performed a variety of activities during this time, for example, making and returning telephone calls, preparing notices for the notice board, drafting notes to give out to the parents at sessions, photocopying and so on. The teachers also found this hour a valuable opportunity to communicate with one another as they were not always present at sessions together. They often used the time to evaluate previous sessions and to discuss programme ideas and any problems they had encountered. They felt, too, that their discussions helped them mentally prepare for the day ahead. The teachers also took turns to write up the mobile unit's daily diary which, as each venue was only visited once a week, teachers felt aided continuity between sessions. The purpose of the diary was to record "an honest acount" of the previous day's sessions (for example, the success or failure of certain activities, or the problems faced by that particular playgroup), and was confidential to the staff.

Teachers also prepared the equipment to take to the playgroups for that day. This could be time consuming, especially if teachers were attending different sessions because it was then necessary to decide how the available resources would be divided and packing it all into the car took twice as long.

Once administration tasks and preparation of equipment had been completed the teachers drove to the venue for that particular morning's session or, if they were attending separate groups, one teacher would drop the other one off and help her carry in materials and set up activities, before driving off to her own venue. Teachers often asked parents to help with the task of getting the session underway.

Each visit to a playgroup was approximately two hours long. At the beginning of each session, the teacher(s) talked to the parent on duty to discover the group's aims for the session. The teacher(s) then worked in with what had been planned, sometimes adding to the activities already set out if she/they thought the programme devised by the parents was not extensive enough. The teacher(s) always made a point of discussing with parents why they thought it important to emphasise certain activities, expecially those which the parents did not initially think were worthwhile. They often, for example, had to explain to new parents the 'free play philosophy', where children decide which activity to work at, and that an adult structure is not imposed on children's approach to problem-solving. Sessions often involved as much, if not considerably more, talking and working with parents as occurred with the children.

At the end of a session, the teacher(s) packed up any equipment they had brought with them and, on the occasions when the teachers worked separately, the teacher with the vehicle picked up the other teacher from her venue.

Meetings with other professionals working in related fields, such as public health nurses and social workers, often occupied their lunch break as the teachers felt it was crucial to their work to get to know them (not always a simple matter as community positions changed frequently). The head teacher sometimes also made a home visit during the lunch break if a parent had a special problem that they wished to discuss further with a teacher.

After lunch, the teachers collected any further equipment they thought they would need from their base, and then drove to the afternoon destination.

When there was a double session (ie a morning and afternoon session on the same day), the teachers returned to base at the end of the day, put their resources in order and then went straight home. If an afternoon session was not scheduled, then there were meetings to attend, reports and newsletters to be written and notice board displays to be devised. Planning what kind of activities were suitable for particular playgroups, and whether there were any children whom the teachers wished to monitor or to provide with a special activity, usually took one whole non child-contact session per month. Teachers used part of their administration time to shop for resources and arrange outings for the playgroups; they also frequently telephoned the YWCA office to keep staff there informed of the unit's activities.

Some of the Teachers' Comments on what a 'Typical' Day on the YWCA Mobile Pre-School Unit was Like for Them

"At the moment, I'm working on a notice board display for my .... group, because they are sort of lacking in ideas and so I am working on a big display to boost their enthusiasm about the playgroup, so that is keeping me occupied."

"When it's time to pack up, loading the car is quite a big thing - it is heavy work. Weighing up all the time what kind of activities you have against how much you have got to carry is always an issue."

"I find there is lots of telephoning, not even for anything specific, but because we come under the YWCA, contact or communication with them is quite important; finding out where they are at on things that we have asked them to organise for us, and just following up. A lot of what I'm doing at the YWCA at the moment is asserting what we are here for, and the fact that we are part of their staff, which seems to have been overlooked, and that asserting is actually about educating them to what we are doing."

Some Comments from the Head Teacher on the Unique Character of the YWCA Mobile Pre-School Unit

The head teacher had the following comments to make at the end of her interview which highlight well some of the important differences between the YWCA mobile pre-school unit and the other eight units.

"I am disappointed that the research [seems to be] focusing only on observing session times because that's quite unrealistic in terms of the work we do on this unit. [Session times] are a very small percentage of the time we are at work - perhaps half. I am also not convinced that the special nature of our unit is going to be appreciated in interpretation [ie in the final research report] because of being compared with the other units which are much more kindergarten run than this unit. Parents are much more the focus at this unit and, as you have quite clearly observed, we spend a greater pecentage of time with parents [both inside and outside of session times] than any other mobile unit. Now that's fine if you put that in your report and people who are familiar with our philosophy read it and interpret it appropriately but if someone is not familiar with our philosophy then I think it could actually come across as looking negative [especially when compared to the other units]. So I am concerned that our work won't be accurately represented [in the research report]."

A DESCRIPTION OF EACH VENUE VISITED AND SESSIONS HELD BY THE YWCA MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT DURING THE FIELDWORK PERIOD

The YWCA mobile pre-school unit teachers between them attended an average of 16 sessions over a two-week period. The sessions were held at 11 locations, as shown in the map on page 5.

During the fieldwork period, however, it was possible to visit only 13 of these sessions at eight locations due to a public holiday on the Monday and because, for most of the time, there was just one researcher present which meant that when teachers went their separate ways to work with groups scheduled to meet at the same time, the researcher had to choose to go with one teacher or the other. The main features of each of the sessions attended by the researcher(s) are described below in order to give a feeling for the nature of the work carried out by this mobile pre-school unit. (Note that although the following account does not always detail the nature and extent of the interaction between teachers and parents, the YWCA unit teachers did spend a considerable amount of their time talking with parents, especially 'information sharing'. The time that teachers spent in this way is more specifically and formally documented in Volume I of this report. The comments on the facing page, made by the head teacher, are also pertinent here.)

WAIMUMU ROAD : TUESDAY, 26 APRIL 1988

The head teacher only visited this location.

Location and Facilities

The session was held at the Methodist Church hall in Waimumu Road, Massey. The hall was not large - about the size of a classroom - with an adjoining kitchen and toilet. Because the facilities were shared, only a small amount of children's art work was able to be displayed on the walls and the general effect of the hall was rather drab. Besides the art work, the only other 'decoration' in the hall was a notice board listing current events, and a large blackboard.

It became very noisy inside once everyone (17 children and 12 parents) had arrived for the session but fortunately the weather was nice enough for the doors to be opened and some activities to be set out on rugs and mats outside.

The outdoor area was small, consisting of a square of lawn enclosed by a hedge, trees, the church hall, and a wire fence constructed to keep children from running onto the road. There was no climbing or play equipment, not even a sandpit.

The Session

The head teacher worked with the children outside at the different activities. (These included books laid out on a mat, wooden building blocks, balls, a gooey pink playdough-like substance set out on a table, and coloured thread and buttons for children to sew onto pieces of hessian. Tape recorded music was playing in the background.) Children engaged in free play, moving between activities as they wished. Inside the hall, several children painted, supervised by the parents. Morning tea-time was set aside for a 'Teddy Bears Picnic' inside on the rugs: as instructed the previous week, all the children brought their bears along. Following the 'picnic' (with food supplied by the parents) there was a story on the mat for some children, while others went back to activities outside. The head teacher helped with cleaning up from 11.10am and three mothers took mat-time near the end of the morning. The session ended with a dance and a song.

Parents

Twelve parents were present throughout the morning, four of whom spent their time sitting and chatting, with their babies on their laps, looking on at the activities which were underway. Two parents, a father and a mother, worked with the children; they were joined by another parent at mat-time. The father spent the majority of the session working with his son while also chatting with the other parents. All parents without babies to tend helped pack equipment at the end of the session. The parent on roster duty organised morning tea and also helped to tidy the hall.

There was a lot of social chat amongst parents and this made it quite noisy inside where most parents congregated.

After chatting informally to parents, the researchers felt that parents really appreciated the input of the mobile unit into their playgroup, in terms of providing equipment and ideas for activities. This feeling is supported by the sorts of comments parents from this group made (in the parent questionnaire used for the study) when asked what they liked best about their mobile pre-school unit. The following quotes are samples of responses made:

> ***"As one mum among many who have had no training in pre-school education, I find that we are limited in ideas for activities etc. And find the unit always coming up with new ones. Also providing materials etc we normally don't have and good sound advice. It's lovely to know that there's someone there who knows what they are doing and reassure mums that they aren't doing too bad either."***

YWCA Mobile Pre-School Unit

> ***"Their resources make available a much broader range of activities that we would not be able to meet from our own funds."***

HINDMARSH STREET : TUESDAY, 26 APRIL 1988

Both teachers attended this session.

Location and Facilities

The backyard of a parent's home in Hindmarsh Street, Henderson, was the location for this group's sessions.

The session would normally have been held in the garage, but unfortunately the inside of the garage had been burnt out about two weeks before the observation period. Sessions were therefore taking place outside, weather permitting, on the concrete drive (amidst a considerable amount of rubbish). There were no fences to prevent children getting onto the road or to the drive next door, nor was there any large play equipment or furniture to sit on. (Some equipment had been stored in the garage prior to the fire, but it had been damaged in the blaze.) Rugs were laid down on the concrete to sit on, and the kindergarten notice board was put up. The teachers reported that if the weather was cold or wet they would hold sessions inside the house.

The Session

The children participated in free play at the different activities available at this afternoon's session. Equipment and activities included wooden building blocks, metal trucks and 'farm equipment', playdough, balls, magnets and nails, a photograph album containing photos of mobile unit sessions, and materials for sewing - pieces of hessian, wool, and needles. There was considerable one-to-one interaction between teachers and different children and also a lot of intensive small group work. Finger painting, and making pictures with marbles which had been dropped into containers of paint were popular activities. Mid-session there was a mat-time, during which the head teacher told a story and illustrated it by displaying magnetised pictures and figures on the garage door. The group then sang songs accompanied by the head teacher on guitar. Afternoon tea followed this activity and then, at 3pm, everybody - including the children - helped pack up equipment ready to load into the car.

Mat-time at the Hindmarsh Street session. The head teacher used magnetised pictures to illustrate a story she was telling by sticking them to the garage door.

Parents and Children

Three mothers, one of whom lived in the house being used by the playgroup, were present throughout the session. All three mothers worked with the children; none carried out any housekeeping tasks. The mother whose house it was was Samoan; she spoke little English. Most of the 11 children present were Pacific Islanders and spoke English as a second language. Two school-aged children (about 6 years old) joined in with the session as they had not gone to school, and the one toddler present stayed with her mother. Interaction between the three parents present was minimal, consisting of a small amount of social chat and exchange of one or two anecdotes.

One parent commented to the researchers that there were a lot of mothers with young children in the area who did not attend sessions even though it had been advertised that the mobile unit's group met every week. The teachers explained that mothers in this suburb tended to be very isolated and not go out at all, as they had limited access to vehicles and childcare facilities.

YWCA Mobile Pre-School Unit

In the parent questionnaire, two of the mothers associated with this group commented that what they and others enjoyed most about their contact with the YWCA unit was:

> ***"The fact that it is so handy, and my daughter has a ball [ie a good time], learns something new each week. The teachers are very firm but loving and she relates very well to them. It has brought her out of her shyness."***
>
> ***"I feel that the unit is well worthwhile, especially for children who can't get to a kindy or have language problems. I enjoy my time at playgroup, it takes a little effort and time on my part but I feel it's worth it. My children always enjoy it each week."***

Another parent from this group also had the following to say on what she liked least about the unit:

> ***"1. That they only come once a week.***
>
> ***2. It's disappointing to see that in a new housing area more mothers don't participate and take advantage of the unit."***

MASSEY : WEDNESDAY, 27 APRIL 1988

Both teachers attended this session.

Location and Facilities

One room in the Massey Community House was the venue for this session. The room was very small: about half the size of a classroom. The Community House also included a kitchen, toilet, and a number of other rooms not used by the mobile unit. The main room opened to the outside via a steeply sloping ramp which was quite difficult to negotiate, and so most people avoided this access. In the room used by the playgroup, there was one small table with chairs, a sofa, some blackboards, storage shelves (where some books and puzzles were left between sessions), and a rug, but no posters or pictures on the walls. The room became cramped when adults and children all arrived and equipment was set out. Outside, there was a fenced-off area of grass which wound its way down to the bottom of the section. There was a sandpit and portable swings, and mats were put out for the children to play on.

The Session

Children participated in activities on a free play basis both inside and outside eg they played with metal tractors, trucks, and bowls of water in the sandpit, threw balls, worked with blocks and puzzles, and played in the tent which had been made from a piece of sacking thrown over a wooden clothes horse. As well, all children completed a 'nature basin' which involved planting pieces of native trees in small pots containing playdough; they also did a marble-and-paint picture. A combination mat-time/morning tea was held outside during which the children ate their snacks and sang songs to the accompaniment of one of the teachers on guitar. The large group activity was followed by more outdoor play, supervised by the second teacher, while the head teacher talked with parents and helped them to clear up. At the end of the session (around 11.45am), everyone, including the children, helped pack away the equipment.

The week 25-29 April was designated as an 'open week' for the mobile pre-school unit to coincide with 'YWCA World Day'. At this morning's session, therefore, there were two visitors from the YWCA, one of whom worked with the children, while the other mainly chatted with the mothers and children.

Parents

Only one of the five parents present throughout the session worked with the children. The others helped with housekeeping tasks, making morning tea and packing up the equipment. There was one father present but he was mostly outside fixing swings and appearing to keep out of the way. A new mother arrived towards the end of the session; she and her child worked together for the remainder of the time.

There was not a great deal of interaction observed between parents at this session. Although there was some informal chatting from time to time and a small amount of discussion over morning tea about their children and problems at home, they mostly got on with housekeeping tasks.

A jumble sale (not connected with the mobile unit group) was being held in the garage of the community house and the small child belonging to the woman in charge took the opportunity to join the mat-time session and to play outside with the other children even though she was not enrolled with the group.

In their questionnaires, parents from this group showed themselves to be very positive about the contribution the mobile pre-school unit teachers made to their playgroup, for example:

> ***"They are enthusiastic and will do activities like singing that most of the parents are too self-conscious to take the initiative to do."***
>
> ***"They are friendly and helpful when it comes to advice on playgroup activities. They join in with singing and action groups. They stimulate the mothers into participating with their children."***
>
> ***"I look forward to talking to them each week. I think we can't do without them. My only problem is not having transport to the playgroup."***

This playgroup did not have a formal parent committee.

FREYBERG : THURSDAY, 28 APRIL 1988

Both teachers attended this session.

Location and Facilities

A spare classroom at the Freyberg Community School was the venue for this session. It was used solely by the mobile unit and had equipment and furniture stored on-site. The classroom had an open, spacious feel to it: there were just three tables with chairs, leaving a lot of spare floor space. Unlike the previous groups described above, the Freyberg playgroup was able to display posters and children's art work on the walls which, together with good lighting, meant that the place was colourful and bright.

Outside, there was an area about the size of a classroom which was fenced off and was half grass and half concrete. Provisions for outdoor play included a table, large wooden cable reels (which, today, had sacking draped over them to make a tent), and equipment such as dolls' prams, a rocking horse, plastic animals with wheels, and a paddling pool and containers for water play.

The Session

As usual, children participated in activities on a free play basis, although they mainly confined themselves to outdoor pursuits today as the weather was fine. (Playdough, collage materials, books, blocks etc were, however, also set out inside.) Morning tea was held inside with children returning to play outside immediately afterwards. There was a lot of water-based activity which several children appeared to enjoy very much. Other children had fun on the animal tricycles or climbing onto and jumping from the cable reels. Everyone helped to clean up at

11.15am and the head teacher took a mat session for the entire group after that. The group dispersed at approximately 11.30am.

Parents

When the teachers arrived, eight parents were already present and they had the setting up of equipment well underway; most of the 12 children who eventually arrived were also already busy with available activities. A further two parents arrived later. At first, only two parents worked with the children while the rest sat back and looked on. However, part-way through the morning, the head teacher encouraged the mothers to work with the children and this seemed to increase the likelihood of their actively participating in the session.

At one point it was observed that two mothers were inside the classroom cleaning out cupboards while all the others were chatting. There appeared to be two groups of parents: those who stayed inside and knew each other well (their conversation was quite personal), and those who sat outside and did not seem to know each other very well at all. The latter group tended to work more with their children and make 'polite conversation'; for example, they talked about the upcoming camp for mothers being arranged by the mobile pre-school unit.

After morning tea, most mothers remained inside, talking more as a cohesive group this time; someone was off to Australia and they all shared stories about their trips away. All mothers present assisted in packing up the play equipment at the close of the session.

The Freyberg parents took overall responsibility for the running of their playgroup and held regular meetings to deal with matters relating to its operation. The head teacher commented that she was shortly also going to organise a meeting (which she would attend) to enable parents to discuss their differing viewpoints about how the playgroup should be organised and run; she was confident that this would considerably reduce tension evident amongst some of the adults associated with this group. The teacher diary, completed by the head teacher subsequent to the researchers' visit, stated that such a meeting had been held and that this had considerably reduced the problems experienced by the group.

JOINT SESSION FOR THE WEST HARBOUR AND MASSEY GROUPS : THURSDAY, 28 APRIL 1988

Both teachers attended this session.

The Session

This session had been set aside for a trip to Point Chevalier beach with the children and parents from the West Harbour and Massey groups. The trip was organised to give parents and children an opportunity to travel out of their suburb. The mobile pre-school unit hired a mini-van from the Waitemata City Council at a nominal charge. A very small group, consisting of three children, a mother, a grandfather and the two teachers made the trip to Point Chevalier, arriving there at 1.35pm. (Participants were collected from their homes between 12.45pm and 1.25pm.) Once at the beach, the children had buckets and spades, metal tractors and trucks, basins, and hoses and funnels to play with. They went for a walk along the beach as the tide was out, and then looked for shells and crabs. The remainder of the session was spent building sand castles, digging in the sand, and playing in the water pools with the equipment that was brought along. Everyone had icecreams for afternoon tea, and it was a fun session.

Water play at the beach : participants from the West Harbour and Massey groups

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SUNNYVALE : FRIDAY, 29 APRIL 1988

Both teachers attended this session.

Location and Facilities

The Sunnyvale Ratepayers Hall was the venue for the last session of the week. The hall was about the size of two small classrooms (affording the group plenty of room), with an adjoining foyer, kitchen and toilet areas. Although the facility was shared, most of the larger equipment and furniture used during sessions was able to be stored on-site; for example, in the foyer there were storage shelves set aside for the playgroup's belongings. In the area used by the playgroup, there were a sofa and bench seats and several child-sized tables with chairs; larger chairs were stacked in a corner. The hall was sunny, making it a pleasant place to work and play. There were a number of posters on the walls but none of the children's work.

The outdoor facilities were excellent (at least compared to those available to many other mobile unit groups) and had been designed and built specifically with the needs of the playgroup in mind. The facilities consisted of a sizeable, well-fenced area of grass with slide, swings, sandpit, and wooden cable reels (today converted into a tent with the help of a large piece of sacking brought by the teachers). Access to the outside area was via a ramp leading from the back door of the hall.

The Session

The session was fully underway at 10.15am once all equipment had been unpacked from the stationwagon. An education officer was present throughout the morning and she interacted quite often with parents, teachers and children. The children (13 in all) spent a lot of time outside at the sandpit and in the paddling pool: they were down to their underwear and appeared to be really enjoying themselves. Inside, there were a number of activities (eg painting, collage materials, playdough plus cutters and rolling pins, puzzles, dressing up clothes) set out for the pre-schoolers to choose from but most preferred to play outside today. The head teacher remarked that children at this group were more likely than children at some other groups to demonstrate associative play behaviour; for example, she cited a recent occasion when children engaged in dramatic 'office' play which was "exciting and successful".

Shortly before 11am the dough table was cleared so that the children could have their morning tea. Later in the morning (11.50am), after most equipment had been packed ready for storing in the stationwagon, both teachers conducted mat-time: the children and several parents sang songs while the head teacher played the guitar.

Parents

The Sunnyvale parents were ultimately responsible for running their own playgroup and for undertaking fundraising acitvities to earn money for the rent of the Ratepayers Hall and to buy new equipment for use with the children (much of the equipment stored at the hall between sessions belonged to this group rather than to the mobile unit as a whole). Furthermore, the tasks assigned to parents on roster duty included an undertaking to arrive early in order to set up the equipment ready for when the mobile unit teachers arrived at 10am. The main reason for this was that the group also held another session (independent of the mobile pre-school unit) on Wednesday mornings, and liked to maximise the time teachers were able to spend with the children during the Friday session. (It also gave parents more time to observe the way in which teachers interacted with the children and to learn new ideas for activities to use and so on. A comment from the head teacher in her Teacher Diary, however, showed that she would like to have seen more active participation from parents in what their children were doing rather than observation only: she stated that the worst thing about the session conducted at Sunnyvale on the Friday following the fieldwork period was "the minimal parental involvement - a continuing problem".)

There were eight parents present at the session being observed: two worked with the children while the remainder kept themselves busy with administration tasks, or with chatting to one another while at the same time supervising the children.

Several parents spent a large part of the session organising recently bought equipment into plastic bags while talking amongst themselves. Mothers with babies or toddlers kept an eye on them although often the head teacher held one of the babies while working with the older children. The babies were free to crawl around and explore their environment. All parents present helped pack up the equipment and tidy the hall at the end of the morning.

Participating parents commented on the "variety of play equipment provided by the unit", and the "reassurance given by teachers on child development" as aspects they liked best about the unit; for example:

> ***"[They are] able to provide play equipment that I or the play group don't have. The teacher observations could help pick up any potential problems in my son's development."***
>
> ***"That they [the teachers] know each child by name and take notice of each one. They occupy the children, giving the mothers time to talk and usually the children have some kind of art to bring home. They get involved with playing with the kids."***

> ***"I think knowing these girls have experience in pre-school education I can rest assured my son is getting the right sort of stimulation. The unit comes equipped with gear the playgroup would not otherwise have the benefit of."***

> ***"1. [The teachers] supply us with equipment, when we need to purchase it.***
> ***2. New ideas about play we can give our children.***
> ***3. Arrange camps and outings through the year.***
> ***4. Play an instrument, read a story or do action/finger puppets for the children."***

Judging by comments like these, therefore, the Sunnyvale parents (in general) felt that the mobile unit teachers contributed significantly to the success and enjoyment of their group's sessions.

The main dissatisfaction expressed by parents at this group (in common with many parents from other groups associated with each of the nine mobile pre-school units) was that they wished the YWCA unit would visit their playgroup more often.

MOBILE PRESCHOOL UNIT

Parents unpacking the YWCA car opposite the Sunnyvale venue

RANUI : MONDAY, 2 MAY 1988

The second teacher only attended this session.

Location and Facilities

This session was held in the Ranui Community House, which looked much like a residential home (this is probably what it once was). The inside of the centre included a kitchen, and a 'living room' area in which materials such as crayons, paper, and puzzles were customarily put out. Because the facility was shared there was no children's art work displayed on the walls.

Outside, there was a quite large back lawn and a fence surrounding the entire property. Outdoor equipment consisted of large wooden cable reels, a climbing frame, and a 'sandpit' - although this could be more accurately described as a shallow scrape in the ground.

The Ranui Community Centre : the YWCA unit's car is in the progress of being unpacked

The Session

The head teacher dropped the second teacher off at this venue as she was attending another group. The session at Ranui was relaxed and quiet: the fine, sunny weather meant that most children played and worked outside throughout the session. The children appeared to very much enjoy working in the sand (with the usual 'sandpit equipment' such as metal trucks, spades etc); they also seemed to enjoy large motor activity on the cable reels and climbing frame. By the end of the session there was an abundance of children's work pegged to the washing line outside, evidence of the large number of paintings children had completed during the session.

Mid-morning, there was an organised time for the children to have their morning tea; the children consumed their drinks and pieces of fruit at a picnic table outside while the teacher and parents supervised and chatted together. After the break, the teacher set up a 'messy play' activity in the water trough. It was orange slime with an interesting lumpy texture. The children enjoyed touching it; their parents appeared less enthusiastic.

At different times, the younger children were encouraged by parents to play with the blocks which had been brought by the mobile pre-school unit teacher.

At the end of the session, all seven mothers (but not the father who was visiting for the first time) helped the teacher tidy up and pack away equipment.

Morning tea time for parents and children at the Ranui session

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Parents

Seven mothers and a father (who arrived part-way through the morning) were present at the session. It was the father's first visit to the pre-school; he had brought his son along to see what the playgroup was like. The parents did not help the teacher set up the equipment although they were involved with the children at this time. Two parents organised morning tea. The mothers talked with one another and with the teacher about shopping and children. They appeared to be friendly and to know each other well (although they were reserved with the new father). To support the observations of the nature of the interaction between Ranui parents, all five respondents to the parent questionnaire from this group stated that they liked the friendly atmosphere of the playgroup. They also stated that they valued the educational opportunities that were provided for their children.

As with the Massey group, this playgroup did not have parent committee.

HERALD ISLAND : TUESDAY, 3 MAY 1988

Both teachers attended this session.

Location and Facilities

This playgroup met each week in the Herald Island Ratepayers Hall. This was a very cold venue and again, because it was a shared facility, it was not possible to make it look brighter by displaying children's art work on the walls.

The floor of the hall was wooden but there was a carpeted area upon which the teachers and parents placed puzzles, Duplo, blocks, and books. A slide was also brought out for the children to use. Tables were set up for dough play, painting, and pasting.

The teachers erected a makeshift fence at the entrance to the hall to keep the smaller children from running out of the building. The outdoor area consisted of large lawns: it contained one set of swings but lacked a sandpit.

The Community Hall at Herald Island where the playgroup was held

The Session

The teachers drove first to the Whenuapai playgroup, where the head teacher collected some books. She was scheduled to attend the session at Whenuapai today but decided to attend the Herald Island session instead as she did not want the other teacher to have to cope with two visitors (the researcher and an education officer) on her own. The parents at Whenuapai were therefore left to run their playgroup by themselves. It took 12 minutes to drive from Whenuapai to Herald Island.

The session at Herald Island began at approximately 10.15am. There were 16 children present. As a special activity, the teachers had prepared stamps made from blocks of wood and string and the head teacher helped the children create pictures and patterns with those. The other teacher read stories to several children and also assisted children doing puzzles, and working with dough and blocks. The session concluded with a music mat-time.

Parents

Ten parents remained throughout the session. When the teachers arrived the parent rostered for duty helped them to unpack and set out the equipment they had brought in the car. Four parents, who appeared to know each other well, spent the majority of the session chatting together over cups of coffee at a centre table and did not interact with the children at all. The other six parents did, however, spend considerable time working with children (including supervising the two toddlers present) on different activities and four of these parents later helped clean up as well.

HINDMARSH STREET : TUESDAY, 3 MAY 1988

Both teachers attended this session.

The Session

Instead of meeting at the usual place for today's session, the group went on an organised outing to the Auckland Museum in the Domain.

For transport, the teachers again borrowed the Waitemata City Council's community van which they collected before going to their base location and before setting out for Hindmarsh Street. A small donation was all that was necessary for hiring the vehicle (the teachers gave five dollars).

It took 30 minutes to organise everybody into the van at Hindmarsh Street and drive to the Domain. Once there, the group (comprising seven adults and eight children) looked at the New Zealand section in the museum and then fed the ducks outside. Everybody appeared to enjoy the trip although the highlight for the children seemed to be the smelly duck pond which they were discouraged from jumping into only with some difficulty. At the end of the outing, the children and parents were dropped off at their homes in the area around Hindmarsh Street. The teachers then returned the van to the Waitemata City Council buildings.

Parents

Four mothers and one grandmother participated in the outing. The head teacher stated that some of the families involved with the mobile pre-school unit found it necessary to have both parents in paid employment, with childcare becoming the responsibility of older family members (hence the grandmother present at this session). The five adults did not speak a great deal to one another (although the disclosure that it was one mother's birthday did spark a little conversation at one point) but talked mainly to the teachers. The role of the parents (as encouraged by the teachers) during the session was to explain the museum exhibits to the children, and to keep them from wandering off.

PIHA : WEDNESDAY, 4 MAY 1988

Both teachers attended this session.

Location and Facilities

The session was held in Barnett Hall, the Piha Community Hall. The playgroup had a representative on the Community Hall Committee as the venue was also used by the rest of the Piha community for a variety of purposes. The hall seemed cold and, as usual in shared facilities, the walls were devoid of any children's art work or posters. The hall was divided into two rooms: a smaller one which incorporated a kitchen and a very large room which led straight from the smaller area. There was a low stage at the far end of the main hall but no one made use of it during today's session. Puzzles, paints, and blocks were set out in the hall, along with a toy oven and sink.

Outside, there were swings, a slide, and a sandpit. This area was not fenced, and led onto a car park on one side, and sand dunes and the sea on the other. There was easy walking access to the hall, and the YWCA car was able to be driven right to the door which facilitated the unloading of equipment.

BARNETT HALL

Unpacking the vehicle at the Piha Community Hall (Barnett Hall)

This slide, plus two swings and a sandpit, were the only outdoor facilities at Piha

Storage of play equipment in the stationwagon, outside the Piha venue

The Session

The children engaged in free play at the various activities; there was no formal mat-time run by teachers today. Special activities provided by the teachers included playdough mixed with glitter, and stamps made with blocks of wood and string. There was a specific time set aside for all parents, children, and teachers to gather for morning tea. Chocolate biscuits had been provided by parents as a special treat. All in all, this was a very relaxed session.

Parents

Sixteen adults (not counting the teachers) attended the session, 14 of whom remained for all or almost all of the time. Three adults were from the same family: a mother, her partner, and a grandmother. Many residents of Piha (including some of the parents present) lived 'alternative life-styles'. (The teachers stated that it was difficult to manage this group's records as the traditional nuclear family was not common and family groupings changed frequently.)

The newer teacher sometimes found the Piha group difficult to fit in with and it appeared that parents were a close-knit group. However, comments in the parent questionnaire by members of this group indicated that they felt very positively toward the teachers and the service that the mobile unit provided for their group:

> ***"They help the children to join in with other children especially when you can't get them into a kindergarten, also I feel that they are much closer to the kids than what a kindergarten teacher would be."***

Twelve parents worked with the children; four also helped unpack and pack-up the equipment. All parents present seemed to know each other well and talked amongst themselves while working with the children (eg on a matching activity) and doing housekeeping tasks. Two parents remained in the kitchen for almost all of the session and the grandmother occupied herself with her knitting. One parent addressed the group at morning tea to pass on messages from the playgroup coordinator who was not able to attend the session.

RANGEVIEW : THURSDAY, 5 MAY 1988

The second teacher only attended this session, as the head teacher was on leave for her graduation ceremony.

Location and Facitilies

This session was held in a spare classroom (available for the sole use of the playgroup) at Rangeview Intermediate School. The room was not large and seemed especially cramped once all participants - 21 children, a minimum of eight parents at any given time, and one teacher - were present for the session. The teacher commented that the noise level was the worst thing about conducting sessions at this venue.

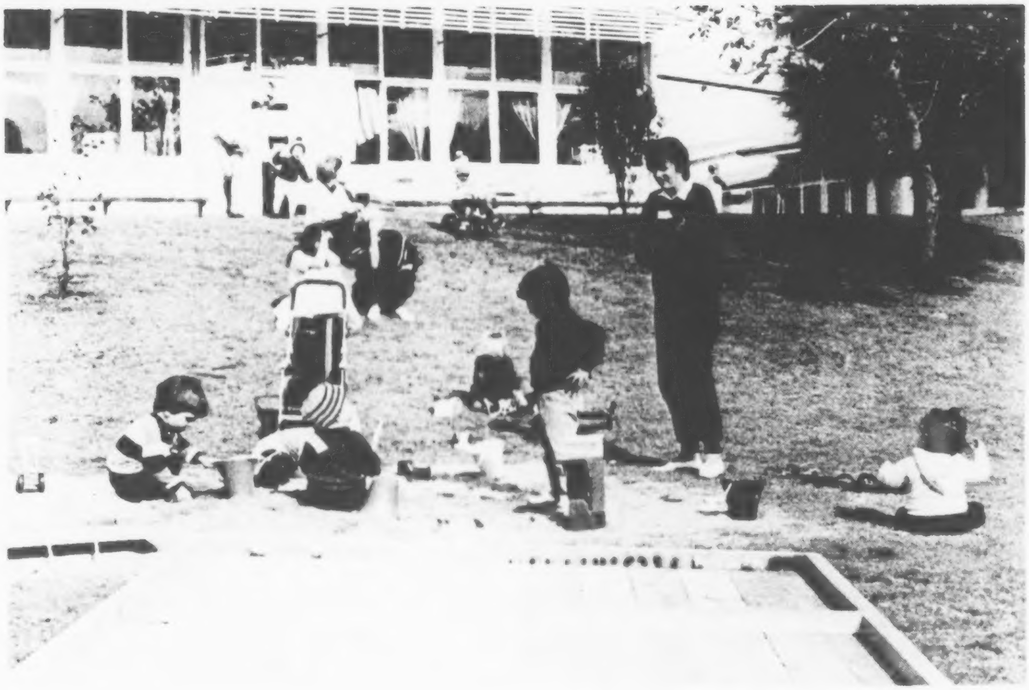
Much of the larger equipment and furniture used was able to be stored in the classroom between sessions. The parents, however, felt they also needed a shed in which to store equipment as they found it difficult having to put absolutely everything away at the end of each term in preparation for the cleaners.

In the classroom, there were rocking horses and tricycles lined up along the walls for the children's use and, at the beginning of the session, tables and chairs were set up for pasting and puzzle activities. One corner of the room was converted into a 'family corner' for dramatic play.

The classroom was situated on top of a small grassy hill. A sandpit situated at the foot of the slope represented the extent of the outdoor play equipment.

The Session

This was a noisy session as the room was not large enough for the number of people it had to accommodate and the children did not go outside to play in the sandpit until parents began to pack up about 30 minutes before the end of the morning. Three children rode trikes around inside which proved very hazardous for the other children and to adults' ankles. The session was mainly free play, with an organised morning tea-time in which tables were cleared of all activities so that the children were able to sit down. As at the other venues this week, the children used paints, puzzles, and stamps. Parents also helped children make pictures by dropping string into paint and dragging it across a piece of paper. No formal mat-time was held.



Outdoor play at the Rangeview Playgroup, looking back at the classroom in which the session was held

Parents

Eight parents were present for all or almost all of the session while a further nine adults (including a father and two grandmothers) were present for shorter periods of time. The teacher commented to the researcher that she only recognised two of the parents present today. This was a common experience for her at this group as people she did not know seemed to turn up every week. However, the parents appeared supportive of the playgroup. For example, one mother addressed the others with ideas about getting a fundraising raffle underway. With the exception of two new parents who watched their children and talked mainly to one another, all other parents seemed to involve themselves in some way during the session, whether working with the children, doing housekeeping tasks, or both. Almost every piece of furniture and equipment which customarily remained at this venue had to be stored for the May vacation, so cleaning up took longer than usual.

WEST HARBOUR : THURSDAY, 5 MAY 1988

As for the morning session at Rangeview, the second teacher only attended this session.

Location and Facilities

The venue for the West Harbour group was the guest house, attached to a garage, belonging to a Samoan community pre-school worker (also a parent of one of the children enrolled at this group) who was paid to help run the playgroup. The walls of the one-room building were plain and undecorated; the floor was covered with woven matting. Couches and spare beds placed around the outer perimeter of the room provided seating for adults. Outdoor play was catered for to some extent in that the children were able to bounce on the trampoline which was next to the washing line.

The YWCA mobile pre-school unit's stationwagon parked in front of the guest house where the West Harbour Group met

The Session

Today, the teacher set up equipment she had brought with her (eg playdough, trucks, paints, and blocks) outside in the sun before driving off to pick up two children who would not attend the session unless she collected them. Seven of the eight children present were Samoan and spoke very little English. The session consisted of free play and small group work; the major activities undertaken by the children were pasting, working with Duplo, and making potato prints. There was neither an afternoon tea break nor a mat-time at the session.

The community pre-school worker/parent with two of the children inside the West Harbour venue

Parents

Two mothers worked with their children and a grandmother worked with her charge. Another mother visited the session briefly. All the adults were Pacific Islanders, and spoke Samoan together. Although relaxed and friendly with the teacher, they talked very little with her; she concentrated on helping the children with their activities which allowed the adult participants to enjoy the session as a social occasion.

The community pre-school worker stated in the parent questionnaire that:

YWCA Mobile Pre-School Unit

> ***"They [the teachers] are doing their best to adapt this programme to suit everyone's needs. Both children and parents. In our group we are free to talk in our native tongues and they don't mind. We also joke with each other."***

SUNNYVALE : FRIDAY, 6 MAY 1988

Both teachers attended the session.

The Session

The teachers had organised an end-of-term excursion for the Sunnyvale group to McDonald's Family Restaurant in the Auckland suburb of New Lynn. It was difficult to count the number of parents and children at this session as the group grew bigger on the journey and some left early, or popped out for a while to do their shopping at the New Lynn shopping mall, but there were about 25 people altogether.

The journey began when the group walked from the Sunnyvale venue to the train station. When the train arrived, the guards lifted the children aboard, and then cheekily lifted all the mothers up too. The train took about 10 minutes to reach New Lynn, and when the group arrived McDonald's was still closed. The waiting was an exercise in self-control for all concerned. When the restaurant finally opened and everyone had their meals (breakfast for some, morning tea for most), the mothers produced a cake for a girl whose birthday it was that day. The children went outside to the play area, and their mothers kept an eye on them from inside the restaurant. The parents took the opportunity to chat together. The group was at McDonald's for nearly two hours; this gave both teachers a chance to talk with everyone.

When it was time to leave, the group walked to a nearby bus stop to await a bus back to Sunnyvale. Unfortunately, on the return trip, a child was sick all over one of the seats. The driver made the entire group get off and transfer to another bus. Despite this, both teachers felt that the trip was a success, as it had given them time to interact with the parents. It was also a relatively inexpensive treat for parents and children, who according to the teachers, did not go out of their suburb very often.

The children clamouring to be let into McDonalds before opening time, on the Sunnyvale group's trip to New Lynn

THE FRANKLIN MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT, PUKEKOHE

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FRANKLIN MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT, PUKEKOHE

Introduction

In July 1978, the District Adviser on Pre-school Education for South Auckland and the Pre-school Adviser from the Northern Regional Office forwarded a proposal to the then Department of Education's Head Office requesting that one of the five proposed new mobile pre-school units, recommended in the Budget, be considered for the Franklin region. In the proposal it was suggested that the hoped for mobile pre-school unit would visit five groups, located at Mercer, Puni, Papakura, Clevedon and Tuakau, communities in and around the South Auckland area. The reasons visits to each of these areas were recommended are detailed below.

The first of the five communities suggested was Mercer, situated 30 kilometres south of Pukekohe. In 1978, a significant proportion of the local population were Maori; fifty-two percent of the Mercer primary school roll, for example, was Maori. The pre-school education advisers, mentioned above, stated that many of these children began school unprepared for the demands of the new entrant classroom. They hoped that a mobile unit would be able to visit the Mercer area in order to provide these children with an opportunity to receive pre-school experience, thereby helping them make the transition to school more easily. For initial visits by the proposed mobile unit it was suggested that the group meet in the Mercer School library. It was also mentioned that there was a strong possibility that a vacant classroom would become available for use at a later date.

The second area recommended was Puni, a predominantly market garden community with a mix of ethnic groups: 68% of the local school's roll consisted of Maori, Chinese, Indian and Niue Island children. The Puni district was particularly recommended as a place in need of visits by the unit because of the high number of local pre-school children with English as a second language. A centrally located hall, adjacent to the school, was available as a possible venue. The position of the hall was thought to be particularly suitable for members of this market garden community, many of whom were unable to travel.

The third group nominated for visits by a mobile pre-school unit was the existing 'Blue House' Community Playgroup which met in an old house donated by the Papakura City Council. The local district was a low cost housing area with many large families. Apart from the playgroup there were no other (formal) pre-school facilities within walking distance of these homes and mothers did not have regular access to cars or other transport.

Although it was believed that the Clevedon community (the fourth venue proposed for visits by a mobile pre-school unit) would not have many problems in financing its own building, in the late 1970s (and currently as well) it was evident that there would have been difficulties achieving the number of children required for a Grade 0 kindergarten (25 children attending both morning and afternoon sessions, with two trained teachers). Visits from the proposed mobile pre-school unit were therefore seen to be a viable alternative to a permanent kindergarten. In addition, it was felt that the existing playgroup, instigated by local parents, would benefit considerably from the stimulus of having trained (mobile pre-school unit) teachers visit on a regular basis. Teachers' contributions to the playgroup would, it was argued, then have benefits for the community at large. There were no other pre-school facilities in the area apart from the playgroup.

Tuakau was proposed as the fifth area that should be visited. It was suggested that a group could meet in the Whangarata Old School, situated close to Tuakau. Although there was a playcentre in Tuakau, some mothers were unable to participate in the programme due to their work commitments. As a result, some of the local children did not receive any pre-school education and this, combined with the availability of an empty school in which to meet, provided a case for this area to receive visits from a mobile unit.

There were some subsequent alterations to this proposed initial itinerary. In August 1978, the Franklin Kindergarten Association decided that Clevedon would not, after all, be included in a mobile unit's itinerary, as the area had an established playgroup and it was expected that the group would soon be granted a Grade O building[1]. Also, rather than parents and children at Tuakau having to travel out of town to meet in the Whangarata Old School, the Mayor of Tuakau offered the town hall supper room as an alternative venue.

A mobile pre-school unit, to be based at Pukekohe, was officially allocated to Franklin in October 1978. As for all other rural mobile pre-school units, it was to be recognised as a free kindergarten and have a staff of two trained kindergarten teachers. A Ford Transit van (a former school bus) was to be supplied by the Department of Education and equipped with play materials similar to those of a standard kindergarten. Each venue to be visited was to receive between one and three visits a week.

The unit aimed to begin operating on 1 February 1979, with authorised payments of teachers' salaries, sessional and association grants, and vehicle running costs commencing from that date. Unfortunately, delays in the construction of replacement vehicles for the school bus fleet held up the release of the Ford Transit van to the Franklin Kindergarten Association. Although the teachers commenced work in March 1979, doing preparatory work with potential participants in Papakura, Tuakau, Puni and Mercer, the mobile unit did not get fully underway until April 1979. When the van finally became available, it was initially stored at the Pukekohe Central Kindergarten but, as vandalism at this kindergarten had been a problem for some time, it was decided to transfer the base for the van to the Department of Education's garage at Ardmore, Papakura, which was near the home of the head teacher at that time. The mobile unit finally opened for children in April 1979, visiting groups in Papakura[2], Tuakau, Puni, and Mercer.

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[1] Rather than a Grade O kindergarten building, the Clevedon area was subsequently assigned its own mobile pre-school unit (from August 1980).

By May 1980, the venues serviced by the Franklin mobile pre-school unit were at Tuakau, Waiau Pa, Mangatawhiri, and Mercer, the same groups it was visiting in 1988 when the fieldwork for this study was carried out. The joint map for the Clevedon and Franklin units on page 97 shows the location of each group.

After the establishment of the Clevedon mobile unit in late 1980, the Franklin mobile unit moved its base location to the Mason Avenue Kindergarten in Pukekohe. Storage of the van was transferred to a service station/garage in Pukekohe.

The Franklin Mobile Pre-School Unit's Itinerary

Although, as stated above, the mobile unit was still visiting groups in the nearby small towns of Tuakau, Waiau Pa, Mangatawhiri, and Mercer at the time the fieldwork was carried out, the teachers expected that visits to Tuakau would terminate sometime during the year (1988) as there were enough children in the area to warrant the establishment of a permanent kindergarten. The teachers did not know then where the replacement venue for the mobile unit would be[3]. Each group was visited twice a week, with three groups receiving one afternoon and one morning session and one (Tuakau) receiving two morning sessions.

The teachers commented during their interviews that the communities they visited were diverse. Although they did not have specific details about the type of employment parents were involved in they said that many parents were farmers while others (some of whom were in "professional occupations such as engineering") commuted to and from Auckland. Teachers felt that a range of socioeconomic groups was represented amongst their families (from "poor to wealthy"). Most families were pakeha, although there were a small number of Maori children attending the unit from the Tuakau area. (The teachers reported that the percentage of Maori children attending the Tuakau group did not reflect the proportion of Maori families in the area as a whole. They thought there was a Te Kohanga Reo in the general area but did not know specific details.) There were also several Pacific Islands families enrolled at the different groups.

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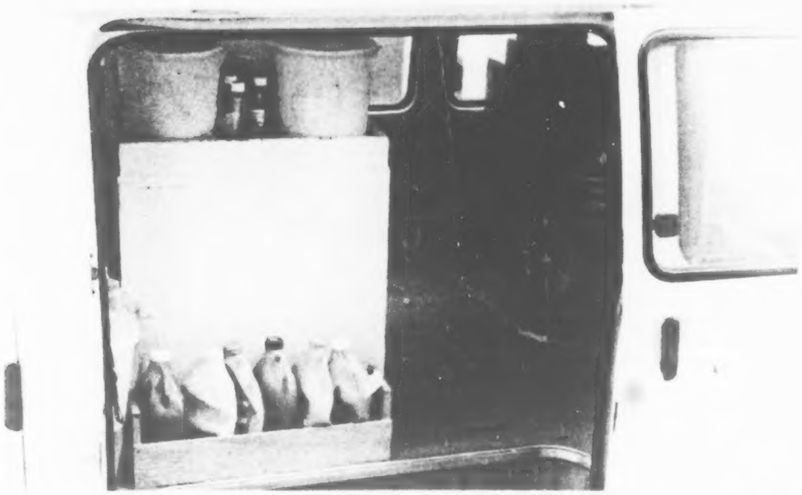
[2] The Papakura group later came under the jurisdiction of the Clevedon mobile pre-school unit.

[3] Tuakau became a permanent kindergarten at the beginning of Term 1, 1989 and the mobile unit began visiting a group at Paparimu instead.

The teachers felt that there were no special community events or seasonal activities that had a noticeable effect on the number of children who attended sessions, except for occasional excursions or events organised by local primary schools which the pre-schoolers sometimes took part in, along with parents and older brothers and sisters.

Travelling distance per week was 343 kilometres. Table 2.1 shows the distances travelled to and from each destination visited by the mobile pre-school unit and the total travel time per week. The mobile unit used a late model Ford Econovan which had been adapted for carrying and storing the materials the teachers needed for the pre-school programme.



The interior of the van, showings its storage facilities

Table 2.2 shows the length of each session run by the Franklin mobile pre-school unit during the observation week and records the time that sessions began and ended each day. (Each group received a total of between 4 hours 30 minutes and 5 hours 20 minutes of pre-school education per week.) Table 2.3 gives the time taken to unpack the van and get each session underway, and also the time taken to repack equipment shortly before and after the close of sessions.

Table 2.1: Approximate distances travelled per week and the time spent travelling by the Franklin mobile pre-school unit teachers

	Base to morning destination			Morning destination to afternoon destination			Afternoon destination to base		Total kilometres per day	Total travelling time per day (mins)
	Morning destination	Distance travelled (kilometres)	Travelling time (mins)	Afternoon destination	Distance travelled (kilometres)	Travelling time (mins)	Distance travelled (kilometres)	Travelling time (mins)		
Monday	Tuakau	12.5	15	Waiau Pa	47.5	30	35	25	95	70
Tuesday	Mangatawhiri	32	25	Mercer	14	15	30	25	76	65
Wednesday	Waiau Pa	35	25	Base (Pukekohe)	36	25	0	0	71	50
Thursday	Mercer	30	25	Mangatawhiri	14	15	32	25	76	65
Friday	Tuakau	12.5	15	Base (Pukekohe)	12.5	15	0	0	25	30
								Weekly totals	343 kilometres	280 minutes (4hours 40mins)

Table 2.2: Length of sessions and times sessions began and ended during the fieldwork period at the Franklin mobile pre-school unit

Name of group/time	Time session began[a]	Time session ended	Length of session[b]
Monday			
Tuakau	9.05am	11.25am	2hrs 20mins
Waiau Pa	1.10pm	3.20pm	2hrs 10mins
Tuesday			
Mangatawhiri	9.05am	11.35am	2hrs 30mins
Mercer	1.00pm	3.00pm	2 hours
Wednesday			
Waiau Pa	9.10am	12.05pm	2hrs 55mins
Thursday			
Mercer	9.00am	11.35am	2hrs 35mins
Mangatawhiri	12.45pm	2.45pm	2 hours
Friday			
Tuakau	9.00am	12 noon	3 hours

[a] This refers to the time the session was sufficiently underway to enable children to participate in activities. Sometimes, unpacking and setting out equipment had not been fully completed but this did not interrupt the session.

[b] Includes time taken to tidy up and pack some equipment before the end of the session.

Table 2.3: Time (in minutes) taken to unpack and pack up equipment at each session during the fieldwork period at the Franklin mobile pre-school unit

Name of group	Time taken to unpack equipment and get session underway[a]	Time taken to pack equipment and tidy up[b]
Tuakau	20	15
Waiau Pa	20	15
Mangatawhiri	10	15
Mercer	10	10
Waiau Pa	10	10
Mercer	15	15
Mangatawhiri	10	10
Tuakau	15	10

[a] Includes time spent before and after sessions began. Unpacking completed after the beginning of a session did not interrupt the flow of activities.

[b] Figures in this column refer to time taken to pack away the bulk of equipment shortly before and after the end of the session. At most sessions some preliminary tidying up and packing of equipment (carried out primarily by parents, leaving the teachers free to continue working with the children) was begun about half-an-hour before the end of the session but this did not interfere with the ongoing programme.

Facilities Used by the Mobile Pre-School Unit

Three of the four groups visited by the Franklin unit met in empty classrooms within school grounds, making it possible to store some of the equipment used during sessions there, and also to display children's drawings and other art work on the walls. The other group met in a community hall, which was a shared facility. More detailed descriptions of each venue are given in the section beginning on page 70 below.

The Children

The age at which children were officially enrolled at the Franklin mobile pre-school group varied across groups - ie at Tuakau (the area due to have a permanent kindergarten established), a group with high roll numbers and a very long waiting list (approximately 70 children), children were not admitted to the mobile unit group until they were four years of age. (This was partly because available facilities at this venue could not accommodate a larger group of children.) At Waiau Pa and Mercer, the next largest groups visited by the mobile unit, children were admitted at $3^1/_2$ years, whereas at Mangatawhiri (the group with the smallest waiting list - approximately 18 children under three years) children were officially enrolled at three years of age. Tables 2.4 and 2.5 show the number of children present at sessions throughout the observation period and in the week which followed.

Table 2.4: The number of children present at each session observed during the fieldwork period at the Franklin mobile pre-school unit

Name of group/time	Enrolled children[a]	Non-enrolled children[b]	Total number present
Monday			
Tuakau	26	1	27
Waiau Pa	20	1	21
Tuesday			
Mangatawhiri	11	-	11
Mercer	11	1	12
Wednesday			
Waiau Pa	20	4	24
Thursday			
Mercer	19	2	21
Mangatawhiri	10	-	10
Friday			
Tuakau	26	1	27

[a] The age at which children were enrolled varied according to the group (as explained in the text) but children were never younger than 3 years.

[b] That is, children under 3 years at Mangatawhiri, under 3 $^1/_2$ years at Waiau Pa and Mercer, and less than 4 years of age at Tuakau.

Table 2.5: The number of children present at sessions (as reported by teachers) in the week following the fieldwork period

Name of group	Enrolled children	Non-enrolled children	Total number present
Tuakau	24	-	24
Waiau Pa	22	5	27
Mangatawhiri	14	1	15
Mercer	20	1	21
Waiau Pa (visited the Pukekohe Central kindergarten)	17	-	17
Mercer (visited Mason Avenue kindergarten)	11	-	11
Mangatawhiri (visited Mason Avenue kindergarten)	10	-	10
Tuakau (visited Pukekohe Central kindergarten)	20	-	20

Compared to most of the other mobile units, few very young (non-enrolled) children attended sessions: those who did, had generally accompanied a parent on roster duty. Despite having an older age group than was usual at many mobile unit groups, the teachers still felt that having to cope with children ranging in age from three to five years within some groups meant a lot of pre-planning and organisation to ensure that there were not only activities suitable for the youngest children, but also activities which would provide sufficient challenge for the older children. (This was one reason for introducing 'homework books', especially for children nearing school-age.)

In their work with the children, the teachers regularly scheduled large group activities (eg mat-times part way through a session, morning or afternoon tea-breaks which were always spent together as a group, and further mat-times to close the session) for each group, making their programme more 'formal' than those observed at, for example, the YWCA and Lakeland mobile pre-school units.

Morning tea-time, Franklin mobile pre-school unit

When asked in the interview what her philosophy was for working with the children the head teacher stated:

> ***"Probably getting them ready for school, I suppose, teaching them to share and cooperate with other children and to communicate with other children as well. I am really into communication. I also think it is good if they can get into some kind of a routine before they actually hit school as it seems to start them off on a really good foot so when they get to school they'll just be able to carry on and know that certain disciplinary skills - like when they are told to sit on the mat or are asked to do something - they know that's what they have to obey. They have got to obey those certain rules throughout life really. And also probably too, [I try to teach them to] enjoy other people's company."***

The other teacher also commented:

> ***"To me, communication is the most important, not just speech but body language and [children] being able to talk to adults and [other] children. I think the most important thing we can do is make them feel... safe and secure and happy because it's their first experience in an educational institution. It's really important that they feel it's their place. [Also] learning to look after each other and looking after themselves and taking responsibility for each other is really important. It's more important for the mobile children because a lot of them are more isolated because they're coming from farming communities - a lot of them only see other children during our session times and that's their only experience with sharing and having to think about someone else - perhaps more so than town children."***

The teachers liked to develop a theme each week which they carried through with all four groups. At the first session held for individual groups each week, the theme was introduced; there were then follow-up activities at the next session. During the fieldwork period, for instance, the chosen theme was 'Jack and the Beanstalk'; the teachers read the story to each group and then encouraged children to plant beans and make the giant's castle at one session, and to create representations of the giant himself at the second session.

The theme for the kindergarten programme during the observation week was 'Jack and the Beanstalk' - here a child is preparing to make a 'giant' from a life-sized cut-out of herself

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Finally, the Franklin mobile unit teachers frequently arranged (approximately monthly) for all groups to visit a 'conventional' town kindergarten during session times. This gave the mobile unit children an opportunity to mix with others and to use all the equipment available in a standard kindergarten. The teachers had to obtain written permission from parents, but despite this and the extra noise as a result of having so many children together at once, the teachers felt these visits were well worthwhile.

Parents Associated with the Franklin Mobile Pre-School Unit

The Franklin mobile pre-school unit relied heavily on parent support in terms of fundraising, and help with 'housekeeping' tasks during sessions. The teachers felt that they probably "leaned on" parents a great deal more than would occur in a 'conventional' kindergarten. They reported that they very much appreciated the help and support received from most parents - which enabled them to devote valuable time to the children - and felt, too, that many parents gained a lot from being 'mother helps'.

One or two parents were rostered at each group's sessions to help teachers set up the equipment, pack up and clean the room at the end of the session, work with the children if they chose, and complete any 'housekeeping' tasks the teachers may have given them to do. Many parents associated with the Franklin mobile unit did not have as far to travel to their venues as parents at the Hunterville unit, for example, and so if they wished, it was possible for them to return home during session times and come back later for their child. In general, the teachers at this unit preferred that parents not on roster duty did not remain throughout sessions. They had found that having a group of adults (often accompanied by babies and toddlers) remain to chat together created too much noise in often cramped conditions and that this hindered the smooth progress of sessions. Any parents not on roster duty, who expressed a wish to work with the children or help out in any other way were, however, welcome to do so. Teachers also encouraged parents of new children to remain for the first one or two sessions. Table 2.6 shows the relatively low number of parents (ie compared to most of the other mobile pre-school units) who remained throughout sessions during the observation period and in the following week.

Table 2.6: The number of parents present at sessions held by the Franklin mobile pre-school unit during the fieldwork period and in the following week

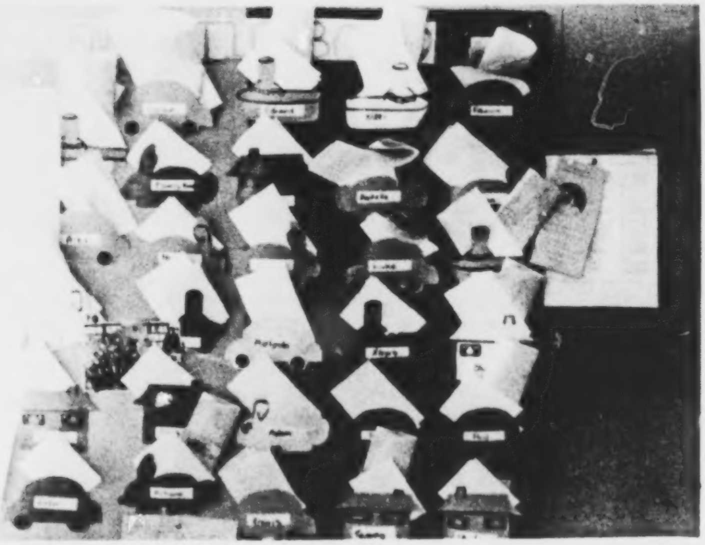
Name of group	Number of parents present during the fieldwork period[a]	Number of parents present (as reported by teachers) in the following week
Monday		
Tuakau	1	1
Waiau Pa	2	3
Tuesday.		
Mangatawhiri	2[b]	1
Mercer	2	5
Wednesday		
Waiau Pa	3[b]	1
Thursday		
Mercer	3	1
Mangatawhiri	1	2
Friday		
Tuakau	1	3

[a] These were parents who had some input into the running of the session.

[b] One of these parents in each case stayed for only part of the session. All other parents referred to in this column remained throughout sessions; most were on roster duty.

The head teacher had, however, at the time the fieldwork was carried out, been trying to establish some parent education activities in the form of informal morning and afternoon teas with guest speakers (for example, speech therapists) to talk on different aspects of early childhood education and care. The mobile unit's library also contained many books on child development and parenting which the teachers encouraged parents to borrow.

At each session, the teachers hung up a large chart made up of 'pictures' of different coloured houses, one for each child. The houses were really envelopes which the teachers used to post messages to parents. Parents were expected to check the envelope with their child's name on it when they came to collect their children.



Notices 'posted' to parents

Although their existing travel and other commitments did not readily allow for home visits, the teachers tried to make themselves as available as possible to parents before and after sessions (or, if parents especially wished to talk to them, during sessions as well) for an informal chat, to introduce new parents to the group, or to discuss matters of concern relating to their children. The teachers, on occasion, referred parents to speech therapists or health personnel with their concerns.

Parents from this mobile unit made some favourable comments in their parent questionnaires. A typical comment is as follows:

> ***"It is an opportunity for my son to meet with other children his age, and relate to other adults when he needs help with things. It also makes him more independent."***

Administration

The Franklin mobile unit was based at the Mason Avenue Kindergarten in Pukekohe where the teachers had the use of a 'shed' in which to carry out administrative and other tasks. The shed, or office, was equipped with shelves and cupboards for the storage of play equipment. The teachers appeared to have mixed feelings about their base - on the one hand, they really appreciated the opportunity that their location provided to discuss their work and exchange ideas with staff at a permanent kindergarten, while on the other hand, they found that physical aspects of their office made administration unpleasant. The head teacher commented on each of these aspects of their base as follows:

> ***"...we use their [the Mason Avenue Kindergarten teachers'] phone and they are really helpful, and we exchange [materials and ideas], you know, if I have got a really neat game, we sort of say 'well, you can use one of ours and we'll use this one for a while', so it's quite good. We can have a swap around and get different ideas off them."***

> ***"...it's that revolting little shed and masses of ant nests at Mason Ave Kindergarten... it's an aluminium shed with a roller door. It's boiling, doesn't have any ventilation. I imagine it's freezing in winter, it doesn't have any insulation. It's infested with eggs all through the cupboards."***

The head teacher often carried out some administrative tasks (such as checking the rolls) during session times. She commented in the interview that the mobile unit's records had been in "an absolute chaotic mess" when she first came into the job but after a lot of hard work, planning and organisation, the books were in good order, making administration a relatively straightforward task. The teachers planned their programme for each group a week in advance; they carried out such planning in their office during their two non child-contact sessions per week (Wednesday and Friday afternoons, 1pm to 3.15pm).

The Franklin mobile pre-school unit's management committee (consisting of the president and treasurer from each group's parent committee), which met every two months, also held their meetings in the teachers' office on Wednesday or Friday afternoons. The parent committees (all parents were automatically considered to be committee members for their area), however, held their bi-monthly meetings during session times at their particular venue. The head teacher attended these meetings while the other teacher continued with the pre-school programme. (This meant that the latter teacher had to supervise, by herself, all children present, including children not old enough to be officially enrolled but who had accompanied parents who wished to attend the meeting. Neither of the teachers considered this situation to be very satisfactory, but had found no viable alternative.)

DESCRIPTION OF EACH VENUE VISITED AND SESSIONS HELD BY THE FRANKLIN MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT DURING THE FIELDWORK PERIOD

The following pages contain a description of the four venues visited by the Franklin mobile pre-school unit. Also, in order to give a feel for the nature of the work carried out by this unit, an account of the sessions held at each group during the observation week (11 April to 15 April 1988) is provided.

TUAKAU : MONDAY MORNING, 11 APRIL AND FRIDAY MORNING, 15 APRIL 1988

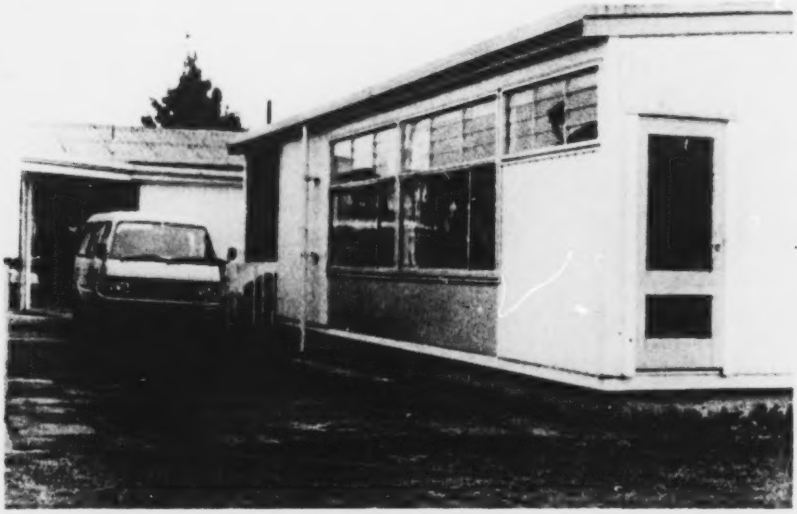
Location and Facilities

The venue for this group, which met each week on Monday and Friday mornings, was a spare classroom at the Tuakau primary school. Tuakau is a small community approximately 13 kilometres south of Pukekohe.

The classroom was primarily for the use of the mobile unit group although an informal playgroup also used the room once a week. The teachers reported that access to the classroom could be difficult, especially in winter. At the time of the fieldwork, the teachers were able to drive right up to the classroom door, but in winter the school fenced off the grass so that it would not be damaged by vehicles driving across it. This meant that the teachers then had to carry all their equipment from the road where the van was parked, an unpleasant and slippery undertaking in wet weather. The teachers had enquired about having a concrete path laid but thought that this was unlikely to eventuate as the community was anticipating acquiring a permanent kindergarten later in the year.

The classroom itself had a large number of windows, giving plenty of natural light. The room was further brightened by mobiles hung from the ceiling and numerous displays of the children's art and craft work. All of the furniture used at sessions was already at the venue. It consisted mainly of two or three low tables and a number of chairs. Most activities, however, were done at floor level: mats were put down for activities involving books, puzzles etc. As well as the furniture, some of the equipment used at sessions was stored permanently at the venue rather than being transported in the van.

The outdoor area consisted of the very extensive school grounds, although the mobile unit teachers tried to restrict the pre-school children to just using an area close to the classroom: this consisted of some lawn (containing a sandpit) and a former basketball court. The classroom used by the Tuakau group was quite near the road, and with only a one bar fence between the grounds and the road the possibility of children escaping was considerable.



The spare classroom at the Tuakau primary school used for mobile unit session

For this reason, the teachers worked hard to ensure that the children were well supervised when playing outside, although the head teacher did mention one instance when some children wandered off, illustrating the difficulties of supervising such a large area:

> ***"At Tuakau there are two completely different play areas, and once [when] we had the end-of-session mat-time, suddenly we realised there were about four children missing. Wthout us noticing they'd gone to the other playground, and they were happily playing away, but it's just such a big area to supervise."***

The informal playgroup referred to above used the classroom on one of the days when the mobile unit did not visit. The children who attended it transferred to the mobile pre-school unit's group once a position became available for them. The playgroup was run by a parent of one of the children who attended mobile unit sessions. The teachers likened the playgroup to a pre-entry group, although they did not get to know the children who attended it until they came to mobile unit sessions. The parents involved with the playgroup did not call on the mobile unit teachers for assistance. They also used their own equipment which, like the mobile unit, they stored in the classroom between meetings. Having two separate supplies of pre-school equipment stored in the same place sometimes caused confusion, especially when the younger, playgroup children helped themselves to puzzles and books belonging to the mobile unit and items went missing or became damaged.

The Tuakau area had sufficient pre-school children to warrant building a permanent, full-time kindergarten. At the time of the fieldwork in April 1988, the teachers expected that the new kindergarten would open at the beginning of the third term in 1988[4]. This meant that the mobile unit would then terminate its visit to this area, going instead to a replacement venue.

The imminent cessation of visits to Tuakau by the mobile unit had consequences for the way in which parents approached the mobile unit sessions. The teachers felt that the impending permanent kindergarten had led the parents to treat the mobile unit as a 'temporary stopgap'. They felt that parents did not consider it worthwhile to put in time and energy to work on any problems that the mobile unit was experiencing given that they were soon to have a standard kindergarten of their own. One teacher stated in the interview:

> ***"With having to share the Tuakau classroom with the playgroup they have there, they've got heaps of stuff stored away in one of the toilets so the children can only use one toilet. And I'm sure they've just piled all this junk and they don't really know what's there, and it's all got mice droppings through it and it's revolting. But the parents at Tuakau aren't very enthusiastic about cleaning up or having a working bee, because they're getting their own kindergarten soon. They keep saying it's not worth giving it a good clean out because we're only here for another term."***

The other teacher expressed similar sentiments:

> ***"Well, at the moment it is difficult out at Tuakau. They have been fighting for about eight years to get a permanent building up there, and fundraising. Well, this year it has all come to a big front, and the building is going up for tender at the end of this month, and they should have their building by next term some time. And the enthusiasm has really dropped off for us out there. We're not getting the help from parents and the parent support that we should be, and no one seems to really care about us much out there at the moment. And it makes it really hard when you go out there, and there's sort of no encouragement or support."***

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[4] Tuakau finally became a standard kindergarten from Term 1, 1989.

Outside play at Tuakau

Sessions at Tuakau

There were 27 children (including one baby at the Monday session and a toddler on Friday) present at each of the sessions held at Tuakau during the fieldwork period. Because of the high number of children engaged in free play in a confined space, the noise level seemed high on both occasions. There appeared to be a great deal of interaction amongst the Tuakau children (hence the noise) whereas, by comparison, children in some of the more remote areas visited by mobile units (especially at groups visited only once a week) tended to work more on their own, or engaged in parallel play. The average age of the Tuakau group was also higher than that of many other groups visited by mobile units, which could again help explain why a greater level of associative play was occurring here than in groups where the average age was considerably younger.

The main features of each of the Tuakau sessions are described separately below.

THE MONDAY MORNING SESSION AT TUAKAU

The teachers collected the van from its garage in Pukekohe at around 8.35am and then drove the 12-13 kilometres to Tuakau, arriving at the venue at 8.45am. One teacher unpacked and set up while the other teacher made some play dough. Children who arrived early entertained themselves with activities as these became available. The session was fully underway by 9.05am.

Shortly after the session began, all the children gathered together to listen to the story of 'Jack and the Beanstalk', the theme for the day. Children were then free to choose what they wanted to do from the available activities, although children working at the collage table were encouraged to make the 'giant's castle' (from the 'Jack and the Beanstalk' story) and all children planted a bean in individual containers of soil during the morning.

At 10.15am a mat-time was held in which a new child was introduced to the rest of the group and a teacher showed everyone what the older children had done in their 'homework' books since the last session.

Mat-time at Tuakau

Morning tea was held outside from 10.35am; following that, children returned to free play, most choosing to stay outside, working in the sandpit, 'painting' (with brushes and buckets of water) the building or large pieces of wood, and playing in the crawl tunnel, although a few preferred to stay inside to listen to a story read by one teacher or to continue with painting or collage work.

Equipment and Activities Available at the Session

Today, the teachers set out the following activities and materials for inside play: play dough with rolling pins and dough cutters; collage materials; Lego; puzzles; books; paints, paper and easel; wooden blocks (stored at the school); prams, dolls and play furniture; and a table containing the pots of soil and beans to plant. Outside, children were able to choose between playing with the supply of buckets, spades and metal trucks in the sandpit; the crawl tunnel; plastic soccer balls; and the buckets of 'paint' (water) and large brushes with which to pretend to be house-painters. Tape recorded music played in the background.

This 'crawl tunnel' was a very popular piece of equipment at the Franklin unit. The children used it extensively during free play and its ability to fold away for storage made it ideal for carrying in the van

Parents

Only the parent rostered for duty was present throughout the morning. She spent her time working with different children (including tending to her baby), preparing the morning tea, and tidying and packing up equipment while the teachers continued working with the children.

At the end of the session, the head teacher asked the parent to wash the floor of the kindergarten. Because the classroom was no longer used by school children the school's cleaners did not clean it or remove the rubbish and this was causing a few problems. The parent helper remained after the teachers had left to complete her cleaning duties. She waited until the last child had been collected before locking the building.

THE FRIDAY MORNING SESSION AT TUAKAU

Although the main activity planned for the day was making 'giants' (a continuation of the 'Jack and the Beanstalk' theme for the week), which were adapted from life-sized cut-outs of themselves, there was not enough room for all children to do this at once. Because of the lack of room, time ran out before everybody could complete a giant; also, the supply of coloured dye used for this activity was diminishing rapidly. However, as there was such a large group present all the other activities which had been made available (ie the dough table, paints and easel, paint and cotton buds, building equipment - plastic wheels and rods that fit together and small plastic building shapes, puzzles, books, and a family corner) were well-used on a free play basis. There was light rain throughout the morning which kept the children inside much of the time; the large group all together in a confined space meant that the noise level was even higher than it had been on Monday and the children were severely limited in the space they had to work in.

All 27 children, including the toddler present, gathered for a mid-morning mat-time at 10.15am to listen to a story, and for discussion of a variety of topics. The children then washed their hands for morning tea which was held inside on the mat. The rain cleared for a short time around 11am and most children went outside for a period with one teacher while the other teacher remained inside with those who chose to continue with activities there. The session concluded at 12 noon after another mat-time (from 11.45am) in which the group sang and were handed work they had completed at the previous session.

Parents

Only the parent helper remained during the session; she primarily carried out housekeeping tasks, although she did spend time with children on occasion. Most equipment was able to be left out, ready for the next session on Monday as the playgroup which also used the classroom did not meet again until the middle of the following week. This reduced the workload for the parent on duty.

WAIAU PA : MONDAY AFTERNOON, 11 APRIL AND WEDNESDAY MORNING, 13 APRIL 1988

Location and Facilities

Waiau Pa is a small community 25 kilometres north-west of Pukekohe. However, its population has been increasing in recent years due to a growing trend for Aucklanders to move from the city to the country. Much of Waiau Pa has been subdivided into ten acre blocks for 'hobby farms'. The beach, not far from the hall where the mobile unit group met, is another attraction for potential residents. A mother from this venue told one of the researchers that the Waiau

Pa primary school was one of the fastest growing schools in the greater Auckland area. The parents were hoping to establish a permanent kindergarten, but one teacher stated that, despite the recent population growth, it would be several years before the area had sufficient numbers to support its own kindergarten.

There was a playgroup at Clarks Beach, 15 minutes drive from the Waiau Pa Community Hall, and some children attended this as well as mobile unit sessions. The playgroup had its own equipment and was separate from the mobile unit's activities.

The mobile pre-school group met in the Waiau Pa community hall, which was a large, relatively modern hall with lots of natural light. During sessions, the wooden floor was protected with polythene and mats. There were no pictures on the walls, and the three tables with chairs did not make it feel any less bare or open. The teachers felt "annoyed" that they were unable to set up the hall like other venues, and stated that they felt that the children attending this group were slightly disadvantaged, because "they can't see their work displayed and their parents can't see it displayed [either]."

Inside at the Waiau Pa venue - note the bareness of the community hall, with no art work displayed

Wet weather brought other problems for teachers when working at this location:

> ***"At Waiau Pa when it's raining, it's just like a downpour between the van and the verandah roof. There's no spouting, it just comes straight down like a big sheet of water - you get drenched."***

The teachers felt that the mobile unit's van was essential for transporting equipment to each location, especially to Waiau Pa, where there was very little storage for indoor materials and equipment. (There was, however, a storage shed outside where tables, chairs and some heavier equipment such as the carpentry table could be kept.)

Outside, there was a reasonably large area of grass, which had been fenced off and specifically designed as a children's play area. It was safer than the outdoor area at Tuakau because the children were not able to get out of sight of the teachers. There were swings, climbing equipment, a concrete pipe, slide, sandpit, large painted cable reels with boards balanced on them for children to walk along, car tyres, and a car steering wheel attached to a stout wooden pole. The children appeared to find the outdoor facilities exciting and stimulating.

Outdoor play at Waiau Pa

THE MONDAY AFTERNOON SESSION AT WAIAU PA

After lunch at their base the teachers left at 12.30pm to drive to the Waiau Pa venue, arriving there at 12.54pm. Most unpacking and setting up had been completed by the time the session got under way at 1.10pm.

Like Tuakau, this was a large group (at least by mobile pre-school unit standards), with a total of 21 children present at the session. One child was only 2 1/2 years - she had accompanied one of the parents on roster duty and spent the time wandering from activity to activity as she pleased.

The afternoon began with the entire group listening to the story of 'Jack and the Beanstalk'. Most children then went on to plant a bean with the help of both teachers and to take part in the various indoor and outdoor pursuits available, including a story read by one teacher and a game led by the other. The outdoor facilities were more extensive than those available at Tuakau, but all other activities available - ie those brought in the van - were the same except that there were no rolling pins or other implements to use with the dough, and a box of library books had been made available for the children to borrow. (There was no family corner at this venue.)

Painting at Waiau Pa

One teacher took mat-time from 2.15pm during which children took turns to show the group the paintings or drawings they had completed (at the teachers' suggestion) over the Easter break. The entire group then took part in a game of musical hide-and-seek. While mat-time was going on, the other teacher went through the homework books that children had brought to the session with them, making comments and writing suggestions for what they could do at home with their parents over the following week. Afternoon tea-break, which took place inside on the mat, was another large group activity. All children then returned to play on the venue's permanent outdoor facilities or in the crawl tunnel brought in the van. The session ended at 3.20pm after a short mat-time when the children sang songs and got ready to be collected by their parents.

The session seemed very quiet in comparison with some other sessions during the week, with participants in general lacking animation.

Mat-time at Waiau Pa

Parents

Two parents remained throughout the afternoon to prepare the afternoon tea, help pack equipment and to clean the hall. (Two, rather than one, were rostered to help at this venue because it was such a large hall to clean.) They also took an interest in what different children were doing and set up painting easels etc, but they did not interact a great deal with one another or with the teachers. (As was the case at most sessions during the week, both teachers and parents were very busy with their own activities, neither party appearing to have a lot of spare time for interacting, except for brief discussions from time to time relating to specific tasks. The teachers commented, however, that the help that parents provided enabled them to spend considerably more time talking and working with the children than would otherwise be the case, time which they were always very aware was all too short due to the mobile nature of the kindergarten.) A third parent arrived in the last half hour of the session and helped carry equipment to the van.

A notice board, with information about the mobile pre-school and items of interest to parents, was displayed.

THE WEDNESDAY MORNING SESSION AT WAIAU PA

The session, attended by 24 children (including a baby in a pram and three toddlers, the latter taking full part in activities) was fully underway by 9.10am.

Instead of planting a bean, which was the major planned activity at the Monday afternoon session, the Waiau Pa children today concentrated (mainly during the first half of the session) on making 'giants'. To do this, a teacher and the two parents present had the children lie down on large pieces of newsprint spread on the floor so that their outline could be drawn onto the paper. The children then cut out their shapes (many children needed help to do this) and then coloured in their 'giants'. While waiting their turn to have their outline drawn children listened to stories read by the other teacher, painted, or worked at the dough table - the usual dough cutting and shaping implements were again available today.

A parent drawing a child's outline in preparation for 'giant-making'

A second special activity for the morning was 'face painting'. As shown in the photo below, teachers decorated the face of any child who wished to participate. This proved to be very popular with the children.

Face-painting at Waiau Pa

Most other activities were similar to those available at the previous session except that on Wednesday there was finger and cotton bud painting and a corner set up as a 'Wendy House'. Cushions were also scattered about for children to sit on when working with puzzles. Outside, the tape recorder was playing and there were hula hoops and the carpentry table to supplement the usual sandpit equipment and the permanent outdoor facilities. Also, as a change, the crawl tunnel was suspended from the jungle gym (parallel to the ground) so that children could take turns climbing through it.

The suspended crawl tunnel

Morning tea for the whole group was held inside at 10.35am (there was no mid-morning mat-time); most children chose to play outside under the supervision of both teachers as soon as they had finished their snack. A very short mat-time was held before the close of the session at 12.05pm.

The senior teacher and a local kindergarten association representative visited for approximately 20 minutes at the beginning of the session. They moved about the room, talking to the children and teachers and observing ongoing activities. The atmosphere at this session was busy and cheerful.

Parents

A number of parents remained for several minutes at the beginning of the session, chatting amongst themselves before going their separate ways.

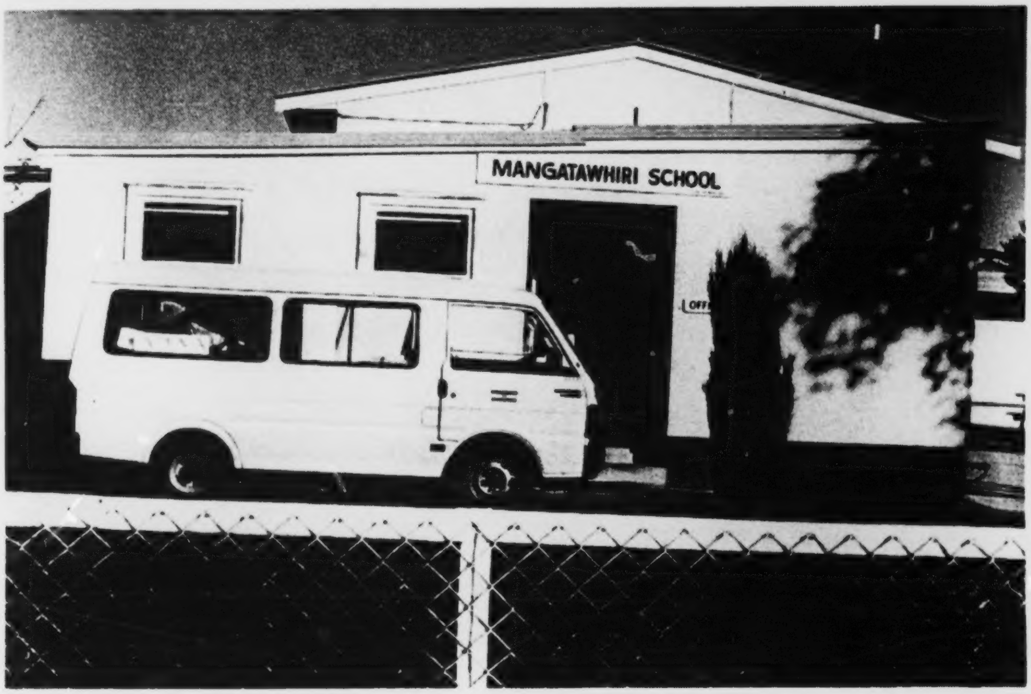
Although two parents present throughout the session were, as usual, responsible for preparing the morning tea and helping to clean up, they also spent considerable time working with the children, especially with those who needed help to cut out and decorate their giants. A third parent was also present long enough to help two or three children with this activity. The mothers seemed to have little time to spare for casual conversation, confining themselves to a small amount of discussion of the tasks in hand.

MANGATAWHIRI : TUESDAY MORNING, 12 APRIL AND THURSDAY AFTERNOON, 14 APRIL 1988

Location and Facilities

Mangatawhiri is a small, established farming community 32 kilometres east of Pukekohe. The Mangatawhiri group met in a spare classroom of the local school on Tuesday mornings and Thursday afternoons.

The classroom was bright and airy with plenty of children's art work displayed on the walls. There were three main work tables with chairs, and a mat area. Other mats were also placed in corners for children who wished to look at books or work with puzzles. Although a considerable amount of equipment and furniture could be stored at this venue, everything, including the tables and chairs, had to be packed away at the end of each session, as the classroom was shared with other community groups. (The parents were rostered to do this.)



The Mangatawhiri venue

The outside area consisted of the school grounds, with a large fenced-off sandpit, and concrete and grass. The pre-school group also used the back sports fields. One teacher stated that the outdoor play facilities available to children attending the mobile sessions were unsuited to pre-school activities and were therefore greatly inferior to those of standard kindergartens:

> ***"I'm sure a lot of the play areas don't reach the safety standards. Things are just too difficult for them [the pre-schoolers], like at Mangatawhiri, a lot of the things are too difficult, too high so they're not extending themselves, they're not a challenge, they're just too difficult. I just think the playgrounds are really boring compared to conventional kindergartens, which are really neat."***

THE TUESDAY MORNING SESSION AT MANGATAWHIRI

Prior to the mid-morning mat-time the group listened to the 'Jack and the Beanstalk' story (9.10am to 9.25am) and then carried out the accompanying theme activities of planting a bean and making a giant's castle with collage materials, cardboard boxes, and glue. Following mat-time, in which the 11 children present (all were of enrolled age) listened to another story and sang songs, there was the morning tea-break from 10.30am to 10.40am.

All 11 children played, or listened to stories, outside for the latter part of the session, finishing off with the entire group, under the leadership of a teacher, running races on the field behind the classroom and playing a game of musical cushions.

From mat-time at 10.15am right through to the end of the session the head teacher carried out administration work (such as rolls and donations) while the other teacher worked with and supervised the children.

Apart from the special 'Jack and the Beanstalk' activities, the dough table was also available, as were books, puzzles, collage materials, and the Wendy House, which contained a set of miniature furniture.

Dough play at Mangatawhiri

Provisions for outdoor play included the very large sandpit, fenced off from the main school grounds, where most children spent their time after morning tea, the crawl tunnel, plastic balls, skipping ropes, and brushes and containers of 'paint' (really buckets filled with water from an outside tap) with which to pretend to redecorate the outside of the kindergarten.

Parents

At this session there was one mother who helped set up the tables and chairs and then left, and one on roster duty who remained throughout the session. The mother who remained did not work with the children at all. Instead, because she preferred it that way, the head teacher gave her the task of cutting up material into small pieces for collage work. The same parent also washed table tops and cleaned the classroom generally, beginning at 10.10am and finishing at 11.25am.

THE THURSDAY AFTERNOON SESSION AT MANGATAWHIRI

The teachers drove the 14 kilometres from the morning session at Mercer, arriving at Mangatawhiri at 12.35pm. Unpacking and setting up took approximately 10 minutes, with the session beginning at 12.45pm. Ten children were present.

Thursday's session was similar to that for Tuesday, except that the major activities were giant-making, face painting, and painting with cotton buds.

Face painting at Mangatawhiri

It was one girl's fifth birthday and a teacher made her a birthday hat. At the mid-session mat-time all the children sat around and sang 'Happy Birthday'; she had five candles to blow out. A further mat-time was held from 2.30pm to 2.45pm, during which the children sang songs and played games.

The session seemed very happy and relaxed, with children fully occupied, even though almost the entire afternoon was spent inside due to intermittent rain.

Celebrating a fifth birthday at mat-time, Mangatawhiri

Parents

As was the case on Tuesday, there was again just one parent who remained for the entire session; however, another parent arrived 20 minutes before the end of the afternoon to help pack up. The parent who was present throughout assisted the teachers to set up the session, worked with the children, and made the afternoon tea. Shortly before the end of the day, a group of mothers gathered outside and chatted together while waiting to collect their children.

MERCER : TUESDAY AFTERNOON, 12 APRIL AND THURSDAY MORNING, 14 APRIL 1988

Location and Facilities

Mercer is another small, but diverse community 14 kilometres from Mangatawhiri - only one of the families enrolled with the mobile unit was reported to be involved with farming. A spare classroom at the Mercer school was the venue for this group. The classroom was sunny and bright with lots of posters, mobiles, and children's colourful art work on display. There were blackboards, three low tables with chairs, a carpeted area for mat-times, and several mats where books and puzzles were placed. As the classroom was not used by anybody else, all furniture plus a range of other equipment (which belonged specifically to this group) was able to be left out permanently and not cleared away at the end of each session.

Outside, the school grounds included a large expanse of grass, affording the children plenty of space in which to run around. There was also a sandpit, climbing equipment (eg jungle gyms), and some equipment intended for older children - a rusty, dilapidated old tractor and a long ramp without sides and which had a three metre drop at one end. The teachers were very concerned about the children's safety at this venue: they supervised the children closely when they were playing outside, and declared some areas (eg the ramp with the large drop) out of bounds. The head teacher stated:

> ***"I'm sure if someone from the Education Board came and had a look at, like, Mercer, where we have got a great big creek running down the side of the playground, and a big old rusty tractor sitting out in the middle, and there is that ramp that goes out into the middle of nowhere, and it has no sides or end on it - I mean they would have fifty million hernias, but we have got to learn to cope with that and our children have got to learn to cope with it as well, and they have."***

THE TUESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION AT MERCER

Twelve children were present, only one of whom was under three years.

Apart from the carpentry table with vice, hammers, nails and wood, provided as a supplementary activity, the same range of activities previously described was again available and the afternoon took the same form as the first of the two weekly sessions held at the other three venues during the observation period - ie the children planted a bean and made giant castles after hearing the 'Jack and the Beanstalk' story, engaged in free play, and took part in large group activities led by a teacher.

The head teacher carried out administrative tasks while the other teacher took mat-time. The overall impression gained was of a quiet and rather slow session partly, perhaps, because there was a special event taking place at the school and several children who usually attended had accompanied their parents to the school instead.

Mat-time at Mercer

Parents

Two mothers, one of whom was on roster duty, remained for the entire session. Both mothers worked with their own and other children until it was time to prepare afternoon tea. From 2.00pm onwards, both parents began preliminary cleaning up after the children and packing away some equipment ready for loading into the van at the close of the session. This left the teachers very little to do at the end of the afternoon and they were able to leave promptly. Although the parents did not interact socially to any great extent, they helped one another with the tasks at hand.

The head teacher commented that when she first began on the mobile unit (in the previous year), several parents usually remained during sessions, chatting together. However, the teachers found that having several adults, as well as the children, in a confined space made running a session very difficult, especially when the noise level often became unacceptably high. The head teacher therefore felt she had to ask parents not to attend sessions unless it was a special occasion (eg their child's birthday) or they were on roster duty.

THE THURSDAY MORNING SESSION AT MERCER

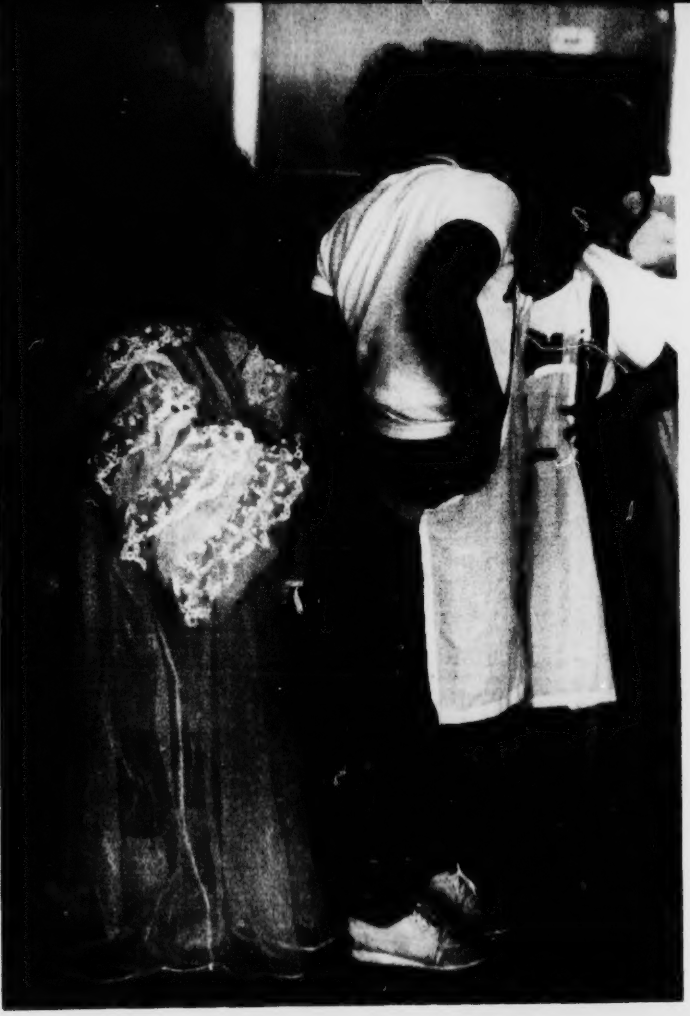
The children who had been absent earlier in the week were present this morning: a total of 21 children attended.

The session was busy with all children keen to make a giant. This task, interspersed with other activities undertaken on a free play basis, mat-time and morning tea, continued throughout the morning as different children needed to wait until an adult was able to assist them. Having their shapes drawn onto paper, cutting them out, and then painting and/or sticking on collage materials was time-consuming, made even slower with many children at once working on the floor in a relatively confined space.

Despite the cramped conditions, and rain during much of the morning preventing outdoor play, the children seemed to have been very happily engrossed in what they were doing.

Parents

There were more parents present this morning than there had been at the session earlier in the week, including one father who stayed to repair a blackboard. Of the three mothers who stayed throughout the session, one chose to remain because it was her daughter's first day at the pre-school and she spent her time working with her own and other children. The other two parents, who had brought their babies with them, cleaned out the cupboards, made tea, and completed general housekeeping tasks. These parents did not interact socially to a great extent, except to comment from time to time about the tasks they were sharing between them.



THE CLEVEDON MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT, PAPAKURA

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CLEVEDON MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT, PAPAKURA

Introduction

The Clevedon mobile pre-school unit is based at Papakura in South Auckland and is under the jurisdiction of the Franklin Kindergarten Association.

During the 1970s, the local kindergarten association and interested parents in the Clevedon area sought to establish a free kindergarten to serve the Clevedon and neighbouring districts. The Clevedon Establishment Committee, formed for the purpose, worked hard to raise its one-fifth share of the cost of a permanent building and, by 1976, had obtained the necessary $7,000. However, the Committee experienced considerable difficulty in finding a suitably central location in which to build a kindergarten. In a departmental submission to the then Minister of Education (dated 15/1/80) it was stated:

> **"More recently, new housing development has slowed down and there is now considerable doubt that sufficient 3 and 4 year old children would be available in the immediate area to sustain a kindergarten. The likely shortage of children is understood to have become accentuated by the reluctance of parents in parts of the scattered area from which the kindergarten would draw its clients to transport their children by private car, due to the greatly increased cost of petrol. Both the Franklin Free Kindergarten Association and the interested local parents have now become convinced that a mobile pre-school unit would more appropriately provide for the pre-school educational needs of the area in terms of providing a service in the immediate Clevedon area and of bringing a service to the children in the more outlying areas." (from Department of Education files)**

The request to Government, made by the Department of Education on behalf of the Franklin Kindergarten Association and local residents, that a mobile pre-school unit be established in the Clevedon area, was granted and the Clevedon mobile pre-school unit was officially recognised from 15 April, 1980 (although sessions with children did not commence until August 11).

The Clevedon Establishment Committee, through the Franklin Kindergarten Association, donated the full cost of the mobile pre-school unit's first van, from the money which they had originally intended to be their share of the cost of a new building. The Department of Education funded all other costs - similar to those which would have been incurred in setting up a standard kindergarten - involved in the establishment of the mobile pre-school unit: the teachers' salaries, administration and operating cost grants, cost of initial equipment, and so on.

The Clevedon Mobile Pre-School Unit's Itinerary

At the time the fieldwork was carried out (June, 1988) the Clevedon mobile pre-school unit served groups located in the small communities of Clevedon, Brookby and Kawakawa Bay. Four[1] sessions were held each week in the Clevedon Community Hall while two sessions were held in each of the other two areas. (As at Clevedon, the Kawakawa group also met in a community hall, while the Brookby group had sole use of a building which had once been a church.) The mobile unit teachers travelled a total of 214 kilometres (Table 3.1) per week in the course of their work. The map opposite shows the location of the groups visited.

Length of Sessions

On average, child-contact sessions at the Clevedon mobile pre-school unit were between two hours (afternoons) and three hours long. Table 3.2 shows the length of each session observed during the fieldwork period.

Unpacking the van and setting up equipment at the beginning of each session generally took between 12 and 20 minutes, depending on the venue and the nature and range of activities being used on a particular day. The parent(s) on roster duty (and often, other parents as well) helped the teachers with this task and, usually, the bulk of the work was done before the children were called together for the mat-time that began each session. Any final setting-up could then be completed while the mat-time was in progress.

Tidying and packing up usually began 20-30 minutes before the end of the session. While the session was still in progress, most of this was carried out by parents; the teachers completed the task once the session had ended. Children were also encouraged to help during tidy-up time, although the help received often depended on the mood of the children on a given day: the teachers reported that, occasionally, children at some groups became excited, noisy, and disruptive during this period (especially children who were "friends" and insisted on "working" together) and could therefore be more of a hindrance than a help.

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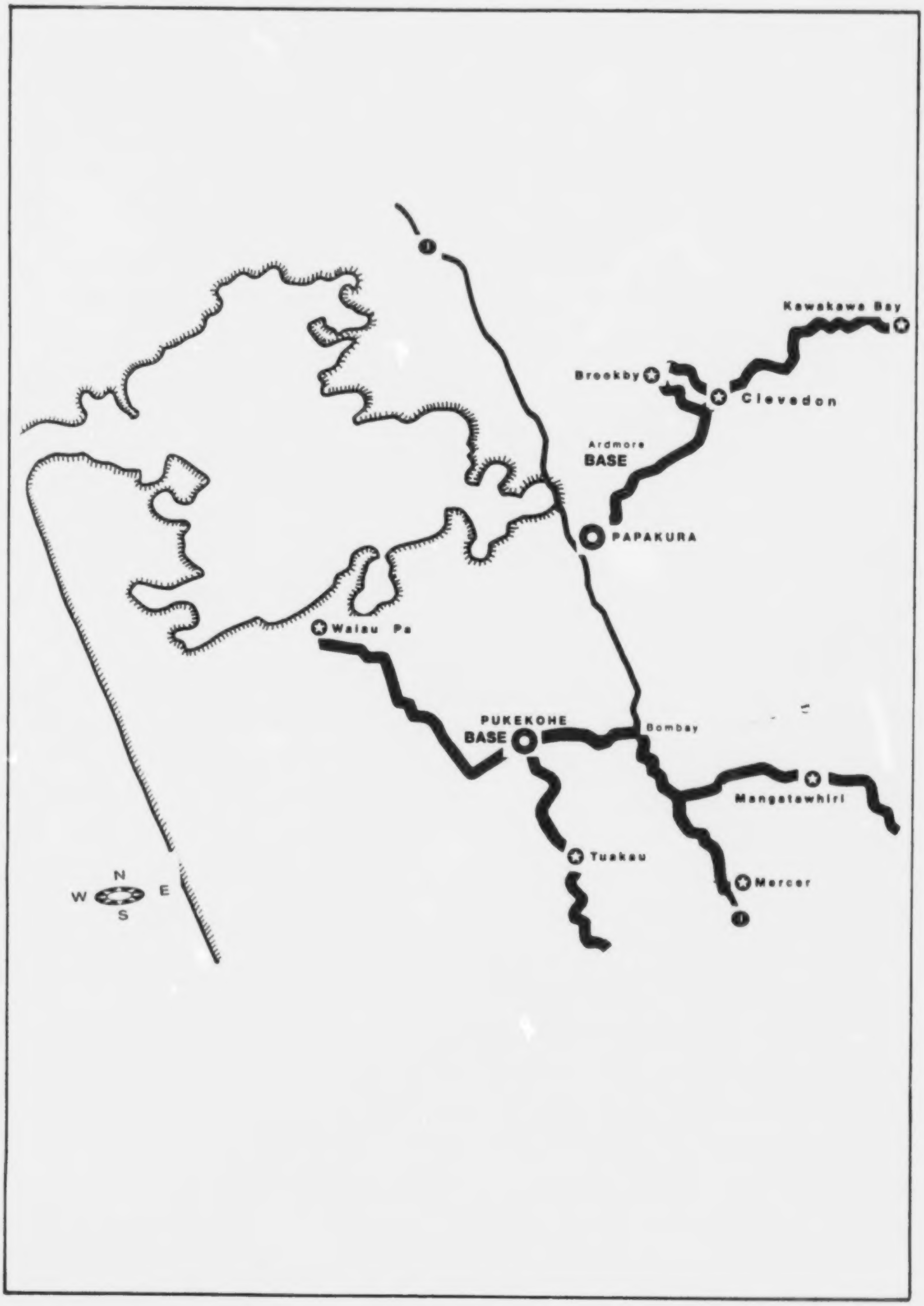
[1] Although four sessions were held each week in Clevedon, given groups of children in the area could only attend a maximum of **three** sessions per week. One session was restricted to children $4\frac{1}{2}$ years or older only (children in this age group from the Brookby and Kawakawa Bay groups were also welcome to attend this session if they could), while another was restricted to children under $4\frac{1}{2}$ years. The remaining two sessions were open to all Clevedon children who attended the mobile unit, regardless of their age.

Clevedon Mobile Pre-School Unit


Kawakawa Bay
Brookby
Clevedon
Ardmore
BASE
PAPAKURA
Waiau Pa
PUKEKOHE
BASE
Bombay
Mangatawhiri
Tuakau
Mercer
N
W
E
S

Scale 2cm = 5 kilometres

Table 3.1: Approximate distances travelled per week and the time spent travelling by the Clevedon mobile pre-school unit teachers

	Ardmore* to morning destination			Morning destination to afternoon destination			Afternoon destination to Ardmore		Total kilometres per day	Total travelling time per day (mins)
	Morning destination	Distance travelled (kilometres)	Travelling time (mins)	Afternoon destination	Distance travelled (kilometres)	Travelling time (mins)	Distance travelled	Travelling time (mins)		
Monday	Kawakawa Bay	30	30	Brookby	25	25	12	10	67	65
Tuesday	Clevedon	12	10	Clevedon	-	-	12	10	24	20
Wednesday	Brookby	12	10	Admin. at base (Papakura)	15	15	5	5	32	30
Thursday	Clevedon	12	10	Kawakawa Bay	18	20	30	30	60	60
Friday	Clevedon	12	10	Admin. at base (Papakura)	14	10	5	5	31	25
								Weekly totals	214 kilometres	200 minutes (3 hrs 20 mins)

* Ardmore was where the van was stored overnight and at weekends. It was approx. 5 kilometres from the teachers' office (base) in Papakura.

Table 3.2: Length of sessions and times sessions began and ended during the fieldwork period at the Clevedon mobile pre-school unit

Name of group/time	Time session began[a]	Time session ended	Length of session[b]
Monday			
Kawakawa Bay (am)	not recorded	not recorded	not recorded
Brookby (pm)	1.15pm	3.18pm	2 hrs 3 mins
Tuesday			
Clevedon (am)	9.08am	12.05pm	2 hrs 57 mins
Clevedon (pm)	12.50pm	2.50pm	2 hours
Wednesday			
Brookby (am)	9.00am	12.10pm	3 hrs 10 mins
Thursday			
Clevedon (am)	9.00am	11.50am	2 hrs 50 mins
Kawakawa Bay (pm)	1.05pm	3.07pm	2 hrs 2 mins
Friday			
Clevedon (am)	9.05am	12 noon	2 hrs 55 mins

[a] This denotes the time at which sufficient equipment had been unpacked and set out to enable the session to get underway. Children customarily became involved with activities as soon as they arrived at the venue and/or as soon as activities were available. Sometimes, further materials were unpacked and organised - usually by parents on duty - after the times given but without disruption to sessions.

[b] Includes time taken to pack some equipment during the session (often with children being involved) but does not include time spent on these activities (or on talking to parents) once the session had ended.

Basic Equipment and Facilities Available to the Clevedon Mobile Pre-School Unit

The Van

The mobile unit's late model Ford Econovan was garaged at the Department of Education's Ardmore Bus Depot. It was also serviced there.

The interior of the mobile unit's van had been well designed to fit it for its special purpose: the rear of the van contained large, three-tiered shelves into which nine large plastic bins - holding a variety of equipment - fitted perfectly (see photo). The middle part of the van was more open, so that larger boxes and equipment could be accommodated.

Although the teachers found the van very comfortable for travelling in, they found it difficult lifting heavy objects into and out of it. The repeated packing and unpacking at each venue was a particular problem for the head teacher as she had a back complaint. Despite the careful design of the van's interior, large or awkwardly-shaped objects did not fit easily, and thus attempts to transport new or special equipment to an area (particularly equipment used for outdoor play) needed careful planning.

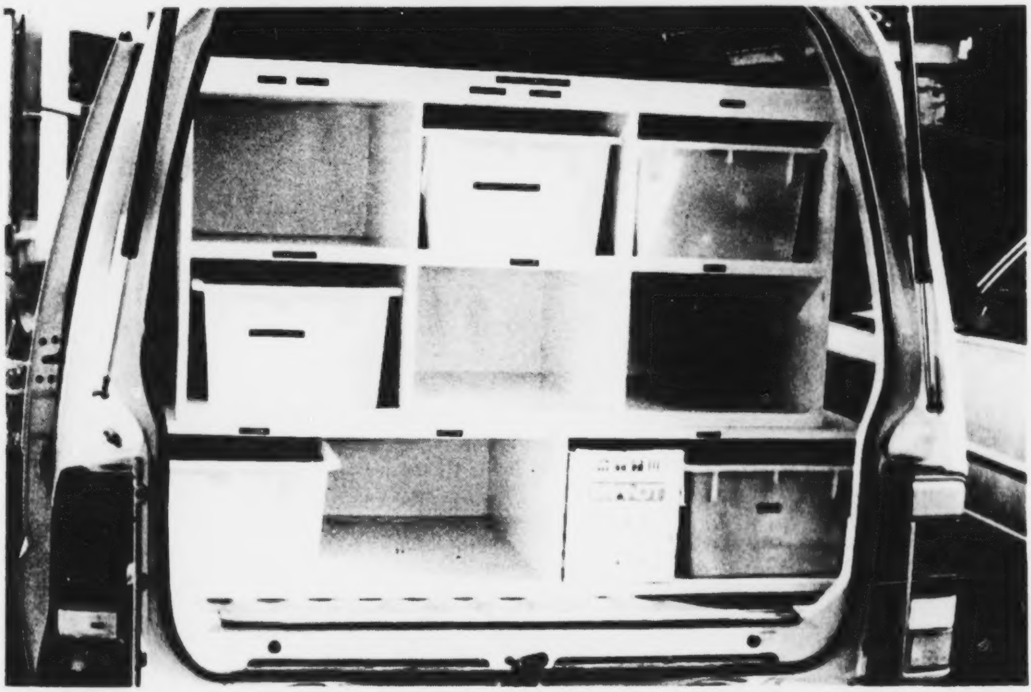
Office and Storage Facilities

The Clevedon mobile pre-school unit teachers had a prefabricated shed or garage, located in Papakura, in which to store equipment (shelves had been fitted for the purpose) and to carry out preparation and planning work. The local kindergarten association office was nearby so, as the teachers did not have their own telephone, toilet, or running water, they were able to use the kindergarten association's facilities. The teachers, however, felt that having to do this was, at times, a considerable inconvenience, especially when they had to carry everything they wanted to wash (paintbrushes, containers etc) to the other building. Although the office was described by the head teacher as cold in winter and hot in summer, the teachers were nevertheless pleased to have somewhere to work during their Wednesday and Friday afternoon administration and planning sessions. The kindergarten association staff took phone calls for the mobile unit teachers and passed on messages as required.

Equipment Used

The teachers carried a standard supply of smaller equipment, such as books, puzzles, blocks, dough, Lego, and collage materials in the van with them, together with special activities (eg screenprinting, carpentry) required for particular sessions. The head teacher stated that, although it would be much easier to have separate sets of equipment stored at each venue, this was too expensive to be feasible. Also, she felt that some groups would miss out on the

The Clevedon mobile pre-school unit's van showing its built-in storage facilities



'extras' because they would be unable to raise enough money to buy equipment, especially when it would only be used two or three times a week at each venue. The mobile unit was responsible for the cost of all equipment carried in the van, while anything that was stored permanently at each venue (including furniture and permanent outdoor equipment) was paid for by the parent committee attached to the particular group.

Communities Served by the Clevedon Mobile Pre-School Unit

The communities served by the Clevedon mobile pre-school unit were felt by the teachers to be "middle-class" and reasonably well-off:

> ***"Yes, definitely no problem with poverty. Some are pretty borderline because of the farming situation but they still have a lot more than a lot of people."***

A few of the children who attended the mobile unit sessions were reported to be from big sheep farms, but most children were from families who owned 'lifestyle blocks'. These are pieces of land which families tend as a hobby, while the main income continues to be derived from outside employment.

Although Brookby is a long established farming community, first settled in the 1860s, its location - close to the motorway leading to Auckland city - has meant that a growing number of its residents are those who have adopted a way of life, afforded by the purchase of 'life-style blocks' (referred to above), whereby they can enjoy 'country living' in the weekends and continue to work in Auckland during the week.

Clevedon is a steadily growing community similar in nature to Brookby, with people moving there in order to combine rural living with working in the city. The teachers described parts of the locality as "expensive".

Kawakawa Bay, predominantly a farming community, was stated by the teachers to be probably a little "less well off" than either Clevedon or Brookby.

Neither of the teachers believed that the (almost entirely pakeha) communities that they served had any special needs which affected the work that they did on the mobile unit in relation to either children or parents. However, farming events were reported to occasionally disrupt sessions a little:

> ***"The only thing I have noticed is that some people are a bit late for kindergarten because the mother had to help with feeding out the bush cane, and sometimes a child does not want to come because things on the farm are going to be far more exciting, they feel, than kindergarten, so they don't come along, that sort of thing."***

On the whole, however, the teachers agreed that, even if certain families were busy with shearing and other seasonal farming events, they were usually able to arrange to have someone else bring their child to sessions if they could not do so themselves.

The head teacher reported that she had so far had no need to liaise with speech therapists, health workers, and so on about any children attending mobile unit sessions, although she would do so if she felt it necessary.

The Children

The majority of children who attended the Clevedon mobile pre-school unit were aged from three years up to five years. Generally, teachers preferred that children under 3 years did not attend on a regular basis and, unlike at some of the other mobile units, only a small number of very young children attended sessions run by the Clevedon mobile unit. These children were usually babies or toddlers, who accompanied parents on roster duty, or children nearing enrolment age whose parents wished them to become used to the idea of pre-school before attending on a more regular basis. (Parents always remained to supervise and work with their own children in such cases.)

The numbers of families/children enrolled in each area visited by the Clevedon mobile pre-school unit as at June 1988 are shown in Table 3.3, while Table 3.4 shows the numbers of children (including those not officially on the roll) who attended each session during the fieldwork period. Table 3.5 gives the numbers of children, as recorded by the teachers, who attended each session in the week following the observation period.

Although each area visited had a waiting list (as shown in Table 3.3), this seldom meant a long wait as is often the case for standard kindergartens. The head teacher stated:

> **"It's waiting to be the right age rather than waiting to get in. We take them in at three [years] at Brookby and Kawakawa Bay, and three-and-a-half at Clevedon and there's usually a space [available] when they turn that age. If there's not, it's not long until there is, and they only have to wait a few weeks."**

With the growth in the communities served by the Clevedon mobile pre-school unit, the teachers did not anticipate that there would be any problem with diminishing rolls in the forseeable future.

Table 3.3: The number of families and children enrolled at each of the Clevedon mobile pre-school unit groups as at June 1988, and the number of children on waiting lists

Name/location of group	Number of families/ children[a] enrolled	Number of children on waiting list at each group
Clevedon	30	27
Kawakawa Bay	18	10
Brookby	15	8

[a] 'Enrolled' children were those 3 to 5 years in the case of Kawakawa Bay and Brookby, and $3^1/_2$ to 5 years at Clevedon.

The children who attended the Clevedon mobile pre-school unit sessions, from the time they began, were all shown the special place that been allocated to them for their coat and bag; children soon learned to put their belongings away, with only the newest children needing an occasional reminder when greeted by the teachers on arrival. (The teachers made a point of greeting each child - and parent - individually.)

It was notable during the observation week that the children were very helpful towards one another and many spent a considerable amount of time playing and working cooperatively.

The teachers liked to emphasise the development of "confidence" ("both physical and emotional"), independence, and social skills in their work with the children. One teacher also commented that kindergarten should be a "positive, exciting experience for children" and that, because of the infrequency of sessions, it was particularly important that whatever they did was "effective".

The Clevedon mobile pre-school was the only unit which ran a session specifically for children nearing school age. (As shown in Chapter 5, Volume I, some parents expressed concern that older children, especially at sessions which catered for a wide age range, were not always extended or challenged enough at mobile pre-school.) During the sessions for $4^1/_2$ to 5 year olds, held at the Clevedon Community Hall, the teachers tried to introduce activities which they felt were appropriate for this age group. They also encouraged the children to complete an assigned task at home with their parents; these tasks were then discussed at the next session.

The teachers arranged excursions and outings for their groups as often as they could. They also organised 'open days' so that members of the community (fathers, grandparents etc) could participate in the programme. These had proved to be very popular with all concerned and usually drew a good attendance.

Table 3.4: The number of children present at each session held during the fieldwork period at the Clevedon mobile pre-school unit

Name of group/time	Enrolled children[a]	Non-Enrolled children[b]	Total number present
Monday			
Kawakawa Bay (am)	not recorded	not recorded	not recorded
Brookby (pm)	10	-	10
Tuesday			
Clevedon (am)	17	1	18
Clevedon (pm)	13	2	15
Wednesday			
Brookby (am)	15	1	16
Thursday			
Clevedon (am)	21	2	23
Kawakawa Bay (pm)	10	1	11
Friday			
Clevedon (am)	20	-	20

[a] Children aged 3 to 5 years in the case of Kawakawa Bay and Brookby; $3^1/_2$ to 5 years for the Tuesday afternoon, Thursday morning, and Friday morning sessions at Clevedon; and $4^1/_2$ to 5 years for the Tuesday morning session at Clevedon.

[b] That is, babies, toddlers and other children under 3 years (or $3^1/_2$ years for three of the four groups at Clevedon).

Clevedon Mobile Pre-School Unit

Table 3.5: Number of children present (as reported by teachers) in the week following the fieldwork period

Name of group	Enrolled children	Non-Enrolled children	Total number present
Kawakawa Bay	14	3	17
Brookby	11	-	11
Clevedon	13	3	16
Clevedon	16	4	20
Brookby	12	2	14
Clevedon	23	1	24
Kawakawa Bay	13	1	14
Clevedon	22	-	22

The Parents Associated with the Clevedon Mobile Pre-School Unit

One or two parents were always rostered to help with each session. According to the head teacher's[2] estimates, the percentage of parents who usually remained throughout sessions varied between 6% and 25%, depending on the community. (Many parents at this unit liked to take the opportunity to have some time to themselves while their children were at sessions.) Most parents were reported as participating in the regular mobile unit's programme for their area about once a month. (Tables 3.6 and 3.7 show the number of parents who remained for all or most of sessions held during the fieldwork period and in the following week.) Parental participation involved helping with setting up equipment at the beginning of a session and packing up again later, carrying out 'housekeeping tasks', preparing morning or afternoon tea, and helping teachers with other aspects of the programme, including supervising and working with the children.

Although parents spent the majority of their time during sessions either working with children or concentrating on housekeeping tasks, they were able to interact amongst themselves and with the teachers while they worked.

The head teacher rated parent participation at more than 75% for those parents who remained during sessions; she also reported that between 76% and 95% of parents who came into the building to drop off their children remained long enough to talk to a teacher, even if only briefly in some instances. (The head teacher, in particular, found the beginning and end of sessions to be extremely busy, requiring her to divide her time between the children and the parents.)

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[2] The other teacher did not yet know how many parents **usually** remained because she had only recently joined the mobile unit.

Table 3.6: Number of parents present at each session during the fieldwork period

Name of group/time	Number of parents present for all or most of the session	Number of parents present for part of the session	Total number of parents present[a]
Monday			
Kawakawa Bay (am)	not recorded	not recorded	not recorded
Brookby (pm)	1	-	1
Tuesday			
Clevedon (am)	2	3	5
Clevedon (pm)	5	1	6
Wednesday			
Brookby (am)	1	3	4
Thursday			
Clevedon (am)	2	2	4
Kawakawa Bay (pm)	1	1	2
Friday			
Clevedon (am)	2	1	3

[a] This group refers only to parents who had some input into the session and does not include parents who came to the venues during sessions only to discuss fundraising activities and other business associated with the running of their mobile unit group.

Table 3.7: Number of parents present (according to teachers) at each session in the week following the fieldwork period

Name of group	Number of parents present for all or most of the session
Kawakawa Bay	4
Brookby	1
Clevedon	1
Clevedon	4
Brookby	1
Clevedon	2
Kawakawa Bay	2
Clevedon	3

Parents appeared to be very involved in fundraising activities for the Clevedon mobile pre-school unit, although as some parents stated in the parent questionnaire, this was the factor they liked least about their mobile unit:

> ***"I don't like having to fundraise constantly to be able to purchase new equipment. More government money could rectify this."***

In general, however, parents appeared to be very happy with the service the unit provided. The aspects of the pre-school that the parents liked best were the opportunities it provided for children to have different learning experiences from those available at home, and that the children so clearly enjoyed their time at sessions:

> ***"Informal, friendly teachers who always take time to speak individually to children. Opportunity to speak with other children/parents. The opportunity my child gets to try his hand at different activities."***
>
> ***"Seeing my child so happy and enjoying everything he does."***
>
> ***"I believe we are very fortunate in having a kindergarten offering a high standard of pre-school learning which must provide many and diverse benefits to my child as he progresses through the education system."***

The head teacher expressed her gratitude for the amount of help and support that parents provided (both with housekeeping tasks and with the children) and felt that it would be very difficult to run the mobile unit smoothly without their assistance. In her interview she mentioned that, when working at a standard kindergarten, she had regularly had to spend 20-30 minutes of her lunch hour cleaning paint brushes and other equipment, whereas on the mobile unit parents took over such tasks. She concluded by saying:

> ***"We need them [the parents] as much as they need us [ie the mobile unit service]."***

The head teacher aimed to always be available to parents at sessions. She felt it was very important to talk with parents and answer any queries they might have about the programme, their children, and other things when first approached, rather than asking them to come back at a more convenient time. She recognised the importance of establishing rapport with parents, not only in a professional sense but in a more social way as well, as some parents were isolated and welcomed the opportunity to mix with other adults during mobile pre-school unit sessions. In this way, the Clevedon unit, in common with the other mobile units, served an important role in providing a social outlet for some parents as well as for children.

Sessions Run by Parents on the Days that the Mobile Pre-School Unit Did Not Visit

The teachers stated that none of the parent groups ran 'formal' sessions on the days that the mobile unit did not visit. However, the Brookby parents were reported to organise informal get-togethers for their children on a fairly regular basis, meeting in a different person's home each time. A few of these parents had considered applying to use the mobile unit's venue but the head teacher said that no one had "officially asked" her at that stage. She did not know what the procedure would be as far as approaching the kindergarten association for permission if they did ask.

Other Pre-School Facilities in the Areas Served by the Clevedon Mobile Pre-School Unit

At the time the fieldwork was carried out, a creche had been operating in the Clevedon township for 18 months. Some of the Clevedon children attended the creche on the days that the mobile unit did not visit their area; the teachers did not have any problems with this arrangement.

The teachers reported that they did not have cause to liaise with staff of the creche and, as there were no other pre-school education facilities nearby, they generally did not have the opportunity to meet with any other early childhood workers (apart from talking with the Plunket nurse from time to time) in the course of their working week.

Teachers' Account of what a 'Typical' Day/Week was Like for Them on the Clevedon Mobile Pre-School Unit

At the beginning of the day, the teachers collected the van from where it was stored at the Department of Education bus depot in Ardmore. They then drove to their morning destination, and unpacked the van upon arrival. As the head teacher had only recently been promoted from her position as second teacher and the other teacher had only been with the unit for a few days, both teachers were in the process of getting to know one another, and learning their respective job responsibilities. The time spent travelling gave the teachers the opportunity to discuss pre-school issues and to build on their working relationship. (The Wednesday and Friday afternoon administration and planning sessions also gave the teachers an opportunity to exchange ideas and to work together on programme planning.)

Most of the equipment used had to be set up at the beginning of seven of the eight sessions held each week: the exception being the day that the unit ran consecutive sessions at the Clevedon venue. Remaining at the same venue for the entire day meant that equipment could be left out and did not have to be set up again at the beginning of the afternoon, although the usual cleaning and tidying up after the morning children had to be completed before the second session began.

Children often arrived before the sessions were formally underway, usually playing with available equipment until the session began, while their parents helped with the unpacking and setting out of equipment. The teachers made a point of greeting parents and children as they arrived.

Sessions began with a mat-time, taken by whichever teacher had finished unpacking and was not talking with parents. If the unpacking and setting up process had proceeded smoothly, morning mat-time commenced at 9.00am. The group looked at what children had completed in their homework books, listened to stories, or sang songs. After this, the children engaged in inside and outside activities on a free play basis.

Mostly, the teachers did not have 'set' inside or outside duties to fulfil; they just worked when and where they felt they were needed at the time. On occasions when 'special activities' (for example, pikelet making) were organised, however, the teachers made a point of ensuring that one teacher was responsible for working with the children throughout that activity. With the help of parents, the teachers were able to spend a large part of each session facilitating play with small groups of children, and interacting on a one-to-one basis with all or most children in turn.

Morning tea was scheduled between 10am and 10.30am each day as the teachers felt that this was a time when "everyone was ready for a sit down". Children then continued with their activities until it was time to pack up. Tidying up took between 20 and 30 minutes; the session ended with a brief mat-time, usually involving a story and some songs.

The teachers were then likely to spend another 15 minutes or so after the session had ended talking to parents before leaving for their next destination. The head teacher stated that it was a "luxury" to have a proper lunch break, as they spent most of this time travelling between groups.

At the afternoon sessions, the cycle of events of the mornings was repeated. The teachers returned the van to the garage in Ardmore at the end of each day.

Teachers' Comments on a 'Typical' Day on the Clevedon Mobile Pre-School Unit

"Every day, we pick up the van [from Ardmore], drive to the venue and unpack the van - or if we're at Clevedon we have to unpack all the furniture and everything from the store room there as well. Usually while I'm in the middle of unpacking, somebody, some parent wants to talk about something. Sometimes that seems like a hassle because I have to stop and help them, and sometimes it is quite good because I can't be bothered lugging boxes around anyway. So usually the unpacking gets interrupted at this stage. Then the kids arrive and we talk to the kids and talk to the parents, sometimes put notices in all the envelopes [cubby holes] and then we have mat-time. Either one of us takes mat-time, it doesn't matter which, it depends on what we're doing. Whether we have mat-time straight away at 9 o'clock depends on whether we've got there early and there hasn't been any parents to interrupt [us].

After mat-time, the kids start playing, they're quite settled. Depending on the weather, they play inside or outside or both..."

"I spend most of the time during session time talking to the children - I used to spend all my time talking to the children but since I've been head teacher it's been a bit harder because more parent things crop up, or somebody new starts and you've got to do all that administration."

"We tidy up between half an hour and twenty minutes before the end of the session. The children always help if they're being normal and then we have another mat-time and then they all go home. When we get away after that depends on how many parents want to talk. The parents are excellent at unpacking and packing everything and tidying up but they do have lots of queries and comments and things that are quite important for us to get to know and us to tell them [which all takes time]. Once we get on our way, we go to the next place and the same thing happens again. We drop the van back to the bus depot at the end of the day and go home."

"Sometimes we hop in the van, or I get home and I feel it's been a terrible day, like yesterday during the session it was good, it was great, it was going well, but at the end of the session something cropped up. It was a hassle. Somebody was late to be picked up making us late getting on our way to the next place and so at lunch time I felt it had been a terrible session whereas in fact it hadn't been, it was just the last few minutes... What happens at the end sort of determines whether I feel it's been a good day or a bad day."

A New Teacher's Comments on What the First Days on the Mobile Pre-School Unit Were Like for Her

As the 'second' teacher had only been working on the Clevedon unit for one week prior to the data collection period for this study, she was still in the process of learning about the organisation of the pre-school and getting to know the parents. She stated that, at times, she felt awkward and unnecessary, and that the parents were better acquainted than she was, at that stage, with all aspects of the mobile unit (the children's names, the programme, where equipment was stored, and so on). She felt that this diminished her professional role:

> ***"As a new teacher, I'm finding it really difficult because I almost feel: 'Well, what is the point of my being here?' They all seem to know what they are doing; they come in here, they set up... I almost feel like they are taking over... I'm just talking from a new teacher's point of view but I think: Where do I fit in here?' I mean, my role at the moment, I am still employed as a teacher but I still wonder at times "Who is the teacher?', but that's [because of] particular mothers too... Because they have been there so much longer, haven't they, and they know the programme pretty well, and they know where everything is kept, and they know what everything does, and they know what time we do everything, and it's probably very easy for them just 'to do'. But I have initially found having parents around so constantly quite difficult... I think it's also difficult to get to know the children because there are so many parents around and so few children anyway that sometimes you'll be sitting there twiddling your thumbs because kids seem to stick with their parents, and also seem to act a bit differently around their parents, so it's hard to get to know them well. There's only fifteen kids and there's four parents and two teachers."***

The teacher acknowledged, however, that it was likely that as her knowledge of the running and organisation of the mobile pre-school unit improved, and as she got to know the parents and children better, the problems she was experiencing would cease to be important factors in her feelings about her work.

Some Comments from the Head Teacher about Her Role

The head teacher, also new to her role, had this to say about her work:

> ***"Since I've been head teacher I get less time with them [the children]. It's funny, because I used to think it would be great, and I used to wonder why [with the previous head teacher] I got left with the kids so much, and I didn't realise so much was involved. I learnt."***

DESCRIPTION OF EACH VENUE VISITED AND SESSIONS HELD BY THE CLEVEDON MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT DURING THE FIELDWORK PERIOD

As stated in the preceding case studies, the purpose of the descriptive account of sessions observed during the fieldwork period is to provide an insight into the day to day running of the mobile unit, while, at the same time, highlighting some of the individual characteristics of the particular unit.

Equipment and Activities Observed During the Fieldwork Period

In order to avoid giving a detailed description of the equipment and activities used at every session observed, the following gives an overview of what was available. The basic range of equipment at each session included playdough and assorted biscuit cutters, rolling pins, knives, and garlic crushers; books (displayed on a portable book stand); puzzles and board games; wooden blocks; paints, paper, and easels; glue, egg cartons and other old boxes; paints and rollers; and a tape recorder, together with a selection of music tapes. Each venue also had its own Wendy House corner, complete with dressing up clothes, dolls, dolls' furniture, tea sets, a play oven for cooking dough cakes, kitchen dresser, child-sized bed, and so on.

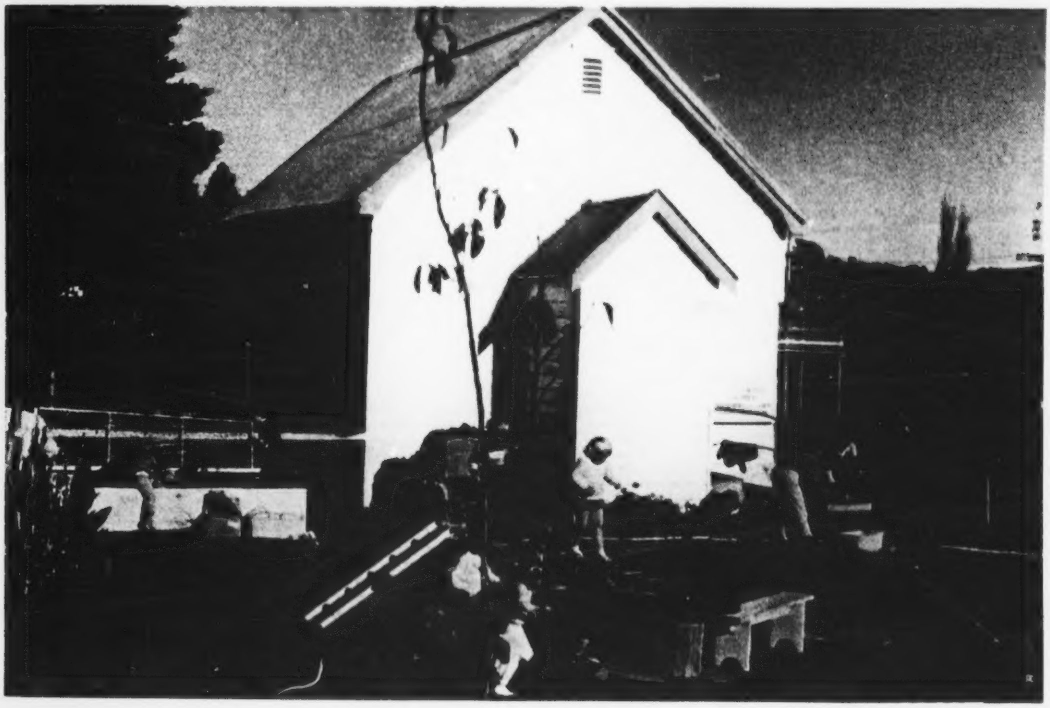
Some activities and materials were available at some of the sessions and not at others. These included: screenprinting; coloured pencils and felt pens; pikelet making; Lego; plastic trains and trucks; crayons with black paper; chalk with black paper; polystyrene pieces and tooth picks; the collage table; woodwork bench and tools; and long plastic tubes and wheels ('Tactics') which joined together to build large constructions.

Outside, each location had a sandpit and a selection of other outdoor equipment such as swings and water troughs. The particular outdoor equipment available at each venue is described separately below. There were, however, always buckets, spades, and other implements (brought in the van) to play with in the sandpit.

BROOKBY: MONDAY AFTERNOON, 30 MAY AND WEDNESDAY MORNING, 1 JUNE 1988

Location and Facilities

Brookby is a small community with a primary school nearby but no other established services. The mobile unit's group met in the former Brookby Unisectarian Church, a wooden building constructed in 1878. The church was small and consisted of the main meeting area, an adjoining kitchen and an outdoor toilet. The facility was used solely by the mobile pre-school unit which meant that furniture and other equipment belonging to the group could be left permanently set up. Some equipment and materials belonging to the mobile unit itself could also be stored on-site.



The venue for the Brookby group

The building was furnished with child-sized tables and chairs. There were also mats on the floor, a playhouse in one corner, a piano, wooden cubby-holes for storing the children's coats and bags, notice boards for parents, and some displays of children's art work on the walls. The building had good natural light but felt cool. (The head teacher reported that it was a cold venue in winter but, although it would have been ideal to have improved heating, this was something that you just got used to and coped with as well as possible.) Despite being small, the venue seemed to be an appropriate size for the group, allowing enough space for children and adults to work comfortably.

Outside, there was a fenced off area of grass which contained a permanent sandpit and some climbing equipment. Teachers and parents had made an effort to create a favourable outdoor play area by obtaining old wooden cable reels and planks of wood to add to the climbing equipment and sandpit mentioned above.

The Sessions

Each of the Brookby sessions observed during the fieldwork period began with a mat-time (which included a story), followed by periods of free play.

On the Monday afternoon, the 10 children present stayed inside throughout the session as it was raining heavily. Before and after the tea-break at 2.15pm, the children's play was concentrated around the three main activity tables: dough play; collage work with glue, egg cartons etc; and, painting, either using rollers and/or working at an easel. Tidy-up time began at 3.00pm: the children helped with this for a few minutes before joining together as a group, led by the head teacher, to do aerobic exercises ('mousercise' - ie the children pretended to be Mickey Mouse and other Disney characters) to music. While they were thus occupied, the other teacher continued working with parents to complete the tidying up and packing process.

A child displaying what he had made at the collage table, Brookby

On the Wednesday, it was cold but sunny. After the initial mat-time, the children (16, including one under three years of age) went outside to play, remaining there for most of the rest of the session. Morning tea was taken on the church steps, with the group gathering to eat and chat together for 20 minutes or so. An exciting moment for the group was when a low flying helicopter passed overhead. The children had plenty to say about it after the helicopter had flown out of sight.

Waving at the helicopter, Brookby

During the Wednesday session there was much water play (with the children working cooperatively) both at the water tank and in the sandpit; teachers and parents also read a large number of stories to several small groups of children, outside in the sun. Everybody helped pack up at the end of the morning, the children participating with enthusiasm. A mat-time from 11.55am to 12.10pm concluded the session.

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Parents

At each of the Brookby sessions, there was one mother on roster duty. These parents were responsible for preparing the morning/afternoon tea, carrying out 'housekeeping' tasks and, on Wednesday, some gardening.

On the Wednesday, two parents besides the one on duty stayed for the first 30-45 minutes; they spent the time working with their children. Another parent, whose child was not quite old enough to be enrolled, also visited for half an hour or so in order to help her daughter get used to attending sessions.

Although parents at the Wednesday session did not have much opportunity to chat together, due to involvement with either their children or various duties, they did have some discussion about the approaching cabaret evening - a fundraising venture - and tickets were distributed.

The Brookby parents commented positively to the researchers about the mobile unit; they also made positive statements in the parent questionnaire used for the study. Some of these comments were:

> ***"Being a mobile you tend to get to know the other children and mothers instead of just dropping your children off and leaving straight away. A more relaxed and open atmosphere."***
>
> ***"Children are receiving a very worthwhile pre-school education. Although it is only twice a week, they usually start at three years [ie earlier than in many standard kindergartens]. Two teachers to 15 children is an excellent ratio and the children are receiving plenty of attention. Big range of equipment."***
>
> ***"It's a very valuable service. If they did not exist we would have to travel into town where the waiting lists are extremely long."***
>
> ***"Provides my children with a stimulating environment which they enjoy, several times a week, still leaving some days free to do our own thing; a friendly place in the community for parents to meet and talk."***

CLEVEDON: TUESDAY 31 MAY (ALL DAY); THURSDAY MORNING, 2 JUNE; AND FRIDAY MORNING, 3 JUNE 1988

Location and Facilities

Clevedon, the most central of the locations visited by the mobile unit, is a small town 12 kilometres from Papakura. At the time of the fieldwork, it had a primary school, a post office, and a few small shops. Mobile pre-school unit sessions were held in the Clevedon Community Hall, a reasonably modern building. The kindergarten used the large supper room and kitchen, which were adjacent to the main hall. Both rooms received plenty of natural light. Double doors opened from the supper room onto the outdoor play area.

The group always laid down mats to protect the wooden floors, and small tables and chairs (belonging to the group) were available for the children to work at. It was not possible, however, to display children's art work or posters on the walls in order to relieve the general bareness of the surroundings.

A small side room had been set aside in the hall so that the mobile pre-school group could store its belongings there. However, as no equipment could be left out between visits of the van due to the hall being a shared facility, it was always quite a major job to move furniture in and out of this room at the beginning and end of sessions.

Outside, there was a large unfenced area consisting of a wide tar-sealed path around the hall and an area of grass behind the building. This grassed area was being developed by the mobile unit group as its outdoor play area. Included in the developing play area was a very large sandpit and an adventure climbing structure. The latter was not quite complete and therefore not in use. (The platform of the climbing structure was approximately two metres off the ground and securely enclosed by railings. A ladder gave access to the platform; the children would be able to descend either by using the ladder again or by sliding down a pole.) The group expected that work on a fence to enclose the play area would commence shortly. The City Council had agreed to pay for this. The fencing was necessary to prevent children from going onto the nearby road or onto the property of the house next to the hall. While they were waiting for the fence to be erected, the teachers and parents took particular care to ensure that children were well supervised whenever they played outside.

UTION
Children
at
Play

Outside the Clevedon Community Hall

TUESDAY MORNING SESSION AT CLEVEDON

Seventeen children aged $4^1/_2$ years and over attended this session. (A toddler who had accompanied her mother to a meeting about a fundraising activity also joined in part-way through the session.)

The morning began with a mat-time from 9.08am. The previous week the children had been asked, amongst other things, to write their address and phone number in their homework books. The head teacher asked each child about his or her work and there was some group discussion. Following a story, read to the entire group, the children were free to choose indoor or outdoor activities as they wished.

Available activities included screenprinting, the carpentry table, and the water trough filled with warm coloured water, lots of foam, and a variety of different-sized containers.

Morning tea was held for the group at 10.20am during which the teachers marked homework books and wrote in a new assignment for the children and their parents to complete for next week. There was plenty of talk amongst the children during this time.

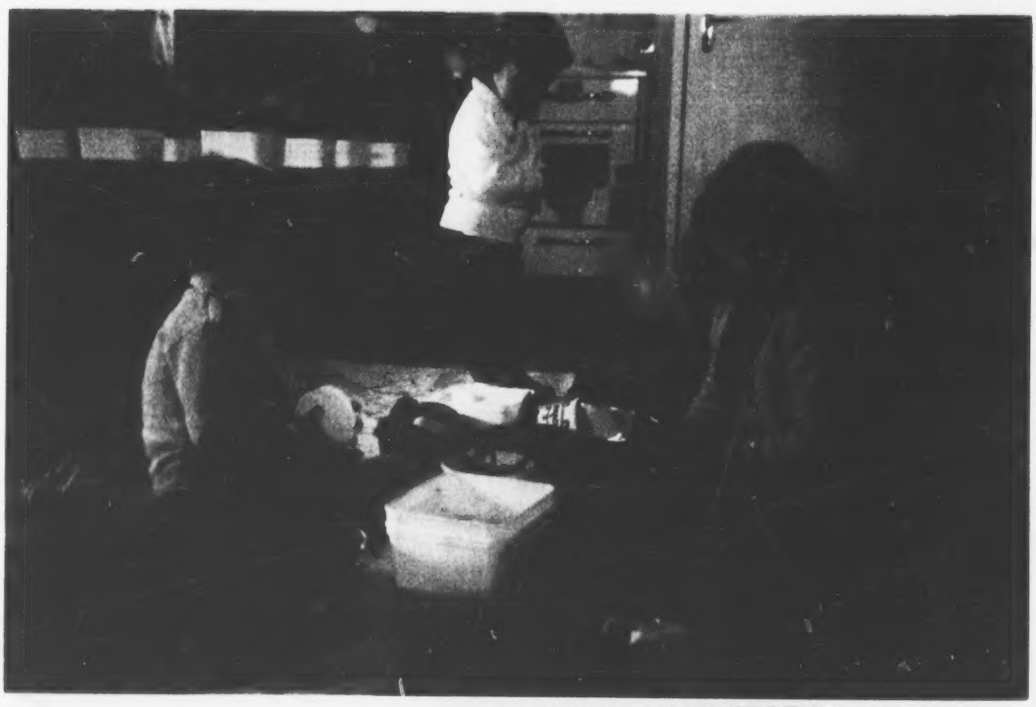
At 10.45am, one teacher and several children made pikelets. Outside, a number of children worked cooperatively to dig huge holes in the sandpit and to fill them with water from a hose. Other popular outdoor activities today included using the wooden crane in the sandpit (see photo) and jumping on the wooden springboard.

Throughout the session, the teachers spent a lot of time facilitating play with small groups of children. They also made a point of talking individually to every child, encouraging them to discuss what they were doing and to take part in a variety of activities. The atmosphere of the session was relaxed and happy.

The morning ended at 12.05pm after the children had listened to another story. The children who had made pikelets also shared these with others in the group and with the parents who were arriving to collect their children.

A child using the crane, Clevedon venue

THE THAMES MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT, THAMES



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Water play at the Clevedon venue. (The mobile unit's van is parked in the background.)

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Making pikelets, Clevedon

Sharing pikelets at mat-time, Clevedon

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Dressing up, Clevedon

TUESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION AT CLEVEDON

This session was held for children who were younger than those who had attended the morning session - ie for those aged $3^1/_2$ to $4^1/_2$ years; 13 such children were present. (There were also two children not yet officially old enough to attend who had been visiting with their mothers from time to time in order to become used to kindergarten.) Because the mobile unit stayed at the Clevedon Community Hall for the whole day on a Tuesday, there was no need to unpack the van and set up before starting the afternoon session. The teachers (and parents), however, tidied and cleaned up after the morning children and also changed some of the activities and equipment that had been used in the morning.

After listening to a story read by one teacher, the group dispersed to various activities until afternoon tea-time at 2.15pm. With the teachers' help and encouragement the children worked at various times at all the available activities - ie they looked at books and worked with puzzles, large wooden blocks, Lego, and dough. They also completed collages, paintings and designs made by means of rollers dipped in paint and played in the Wendy House. Outside, the main attractions were making tunnels and roads in the sandpit, taking turns to use the crane, and playing at the water tank, although a few children also worked at the carpentry table and jumped on and off the springboard. Packing up time began at 2.45pm, with all adults and children joining in to help, although 'help' from the children was more of an excuse for them to play chasing games and generally enjoy themselves as noisily as possible. The group calmed down again when a story was read to them in a final, brief mat-time at 3pm. Children began leaving with their parents at 3.05pm.

THURSDAY MORNING SESSION AT CLEVEDON

The Thursday morning session, attended by 21 enrolled children (plus a baby and a toddler who had accompanied the two parents on roster duty), involved much the same range of activities as the Tuesday sessions. The Wendy House, however, was set up in a different position in the room, and plastic trains and tracks, black paper and chalk, polystyrene pieces and toothpicks had been added for children to work and play with. The initial mat-time, which began at 9.00am, involved the group listening to a story and singing songs. Because it was cold outside, children remained in the hall until after they had had morning tea. (A group of children was observed helping one another - see photo on title page - to dress up from the clothes available in the Wendy House.) Most children then chose outside activities (predominantly, the sandpit) for the remainder of the session. Although this was a large group, there were four adults (the teachers and two parents) present throughout the session which allowed ample opportunity for facilitating play with small groups or with individual children. A father who arrived to paint the new climbing platform also interacted with children from time to time. As it was one child's fifth birthday, everyone sang happy birthday to him at the final mat-time.

Discussing the task in hand, Clevedon

Taking turns to use the crane, Clevedon

In the sandpit, Clevedon. (Note the father painting the new wooden climbing platform.)

FRIDAY MORNING SESSION AT CLEVEDON

On Friday morning, in addition to the other activities available earlier in the week at this venue, there was a special screenprinting activity organised by one of the teachers, plus another special activity called 'Tactics', a set of long plastic tubes and wheels which, when joined together, made a variety of - often large - constructions. (A visiting father spent 20 minutes or so helping children with this activity, before leaving again.)

After morning tea, some of the 20 children present went outside to play at the water trough and in the sandpit. Around mid-morning, a helicopter landed in a nearby field and all the children went on a five minute excursion with the teachers to wave as it took off again. This generated much discussion amongst children, and between children and teachers.

The children were very busy - and noisy - at this session. Next door, in the main part of the building, people were arriving to donate blood and so, as well as the supper room which the mobile group used, the rest of the hall was full of people, adding to the general noise level and feeling of activity. The children, however, enthusiastically joined in the tidying up process from 11.38am until mat-time. The session ended at 12 noon.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT DURING THE THREE SESSIONS HELD AT THE CLEVEDON COMMUNITY HALL

Two parents were rostered for duty at each of the four Clevedon sessions. As one parent from the area commented in the parent questionnaire:

> ***"Clevedon is a close knit community. Parent help is essential for the mobile. We have a parent directory and if a duty day does not suit, because we all know each other, it is no problem to ring another parent and swap a duty."***

Tuesday Morning Session

Four women present at the beginning helped the teachers to unpack equipment and get the hall ready for the session. The two parents on duty - the only ones to remain throughout the morning - then worked with the children (eg by reading stories, helping children doing collage work, putting paper on easels for those who wanted to paint, and so on) until morning tea-time; they also continued to interact with various children after the break until it was time to wash down tables and generally tidy up in readiness for the afternoon session. Their duties did not allow a great deal of opportunity to chat with one another or with the teachers during the session although they, and a group of other parents, spent a few minutes chatting together before the session began.

Around 11am, a large group of mothers arrived at the hall in order to have a meeting about the cabaret they were organising as a fundraising venture for the mobile unit. They met in the kitchen.

A father also spent some time at the venue, doing minor repairs to various pieces of equipment. As well, he spent a short time working and chatting with various children in the sandpit.

Tuesday Afternoon Session

Five parents remained throughout the session, while a sixth parent arrived in time to help the others pack up. Housekeeping tasks were shared amongst all the parents present, which left more time to work with the children and to chat - usually individually - with the teachers. Two parents, whose children were not yet of enrolled age, were visitors and spent considerable time observing the session as well as supervising and working with their own children.

Parents and children at the carpentry table, Clevedon

Thursday Morning Session

Only the two parents on duty remained throughout the session. Each of these parents worked with the children, one doing so more than the other. The second parent spent approximately three-quarters of an hour in the kitchen organising collage materials for future sessions and putting board games into plastic bags so that these could be borrowed by children and their parents on a lending library basis. Although their interactions with children, and specific tasks, kept them busily occupied throughout the morning, the parents were able to chat with one another and with the teachers from time to time - but mostly during the mid-morning tea break.

A third parent arrived in time to help with housekeeping tasks at the end of the session. A father was also present for part of the morning: he mainly spent his time painting the new adventure climbing structure but, as he was a focus of interest for some of the children for a time, he was also required to answer a number of queries about what he was doing.

The pattern at the Clevedon venue seemed to be for parents to spend several minutes before and/or after sessions chatting together before going their separate ways.

Friday Morning Session

The mothers rostered for duty demonstrated the same pattern of completing housekeeping tasks and working with children as had occurred earlier in the week at this venue.

As for the Thursday session, there was again a father present for part of the session: he helped children who were working on the Tactics activity.

At the beginning of the session, four other mothers gathered in the kitchen to discuss the fundraising cabaret and general committee business. They did not have any involvement in the session itself.

At the end of the morning, the two parents on duty, plus two others, remained at the hall in order to wash the floor.

Other Comments about Sessions at the Clevedon Community Hall

Some parents disliked the amount of unpacking and putting away of equipment that was necessary each time the mobile unit visited the Clevedon venue. These parents felt that this reduced the time teachers were able to spend with the children and the time available for children to spend on the various activities before they had to be packed away again.

The teachers, too, found the unpacking and packing of every piece of equipment to be both tedious and a lot of hard work, especially on Tuesdays when they ran two concurrent sessions at Clevedon - resulting in a lot of equipment being used during the course of the day and a more than usual amount of cleaning having to be done at the end of the afternoon. The head teacher commented in her Teacher Diary that:

> ***"Tidying up at Clevedon on a Tuesday afternoon is one big frustrating hassle."***

In fact, the head teacher (new to her role) sometimes seemed to find the entire day at the Clevedon venue to be very tiring. She again commented in her Diary:

> ***"The kids probably found the session the same as any other but afternoon sessions [at Clevedon] with extra parents [who want or need attention] and children are hard work and frustrating. Leaves me feeling very grumpy."***

Finally, the teachers and also some parents, were less than satisfied with the venue itself. They regretted not being able to display any of the children's art work, and were unhappy about the lack of fencing and the quality of some of the outdoor equipment. They were therefore looking forward to when the fence which had been ordered was erected and plans for improving the outdoor area had been completed.

KAWAKAWA BAY : THURSDAY, 2 JUNE 1988

The Clevedon mobile pre-school unit visited Kawakawa Bay on Monday mornings and Thursday afternoons. However, due to airport closure, the researchers were unable to attend the Monday session. The following discussion therefore relates only to the Thursday session at this venue.

Location and Facilities

Kawakawa Bay is a small residential community by the sea, 30 kilometres from Papakura, the mobile unit's base location. There were a few shops and it had the air of a holiday township. The Kawakawa Bay Community Hall was a relatively new building with a basement room available for sole use by the mobile pre-school unit. The basement area was approximately the size of a typical classroom and equipment, set up in a similar manner to a junior classroom at school, was able to be left out between sessions. There were tables and chairs, old sofas, blackboards and screens, and a Wendy House corner. The room was light and airy and displays of children's art work helped to make it seem bright and welcoming and a good place to spend some time.

The outdoor area was small, with very little grass, although there was a large playing field next door. It was fenced right around, and contained swings (the base of which were surrounded by woodchips), a slide, and a sandpit. There were some colourful murals painted on the sides of a large concrete tank near the swings. (The teachers would have preferred a larger outdoor play area but felt that, as the group was quite small, it was reasonably acceptable.

The Session

The session began with children playing board games with one teacher, as the head teacher was involved in talking with several mothers. (One of these women was a former mobile pre-school unit teacher.) All of these parents left once they had had a chance to talk with the teacher.

Mat-time began at the later than usual time of 1.20pm: a story was read to the group and then the teachers explained that they were all going to have a walk along the nearby beach. They invited the children to talk about what they might find on the beach. This generated considerable discussion between teachers and children and amongst the children.

The group (except for one mother and her under-three-year-old, who preferred to remain in the kindergarten and play with activities there) left for the beach at 1.40pm. The tide was out and the children puddled along in the mudflats looking for crabs. The adults (including the parent on roster duty) discussed aspects of the crabs, as well as shells and other discoveries, with the children. A dog joined in the expedition and followed the children - much to their enjoyment - on their return to the community hall.

The beach excursion lasted about three-quarters of an hour; once back at the kindergarten everybody had afternoon tea together. During the remainder of the session, all children played outside (although, apart from the sandpit, the swings and slide, no additional outdoor equipment from the van was made available today). The children appeared to enjoy the opportunity simply to be together and there was a lot of giggling and chatter.

Outdoor play at the Kawakawa Bay group

The session concluded with the children gathering on the mat to listen to a story.

Children and Parents

There was a small group of children present at the session and, for most of the time, just one mother, although another did arrive part-way through the session: she was getting her daughter - who was on the waiting list - used to the idea of attending sessions by bringing her for a short time each week. She helped the parent on duty to pack up.

The teachers reported in their Teacher Diaries that the best thing about sessions at Kawakawa Bay was working with the small groups of children, which allowed for plenty of one-to-one and small group interactions. They also described the children as "lovely" and a delight to work with. (The small group size, and the nature of the children, compensated to a great extent for any inconvenience caused when everybody had to stay inside because of bad weather or the occasions when one teacher had to attend the group's monthly parent committee meeting, held during session times, leaving the other teacher to conduct the session on her own.)

Parents appeared to value the many ways in which the Clevedon mobile pre-school unit contributed to the Kawakawa Bay community. For example, parents from this group made comments such as the following in their parent questionnaires:

> ***"Without the mobile unit, it would be a real loss to the children and mothers. It is a valuable asset in our community."***
>
> ***"I have found the mobile unit is always on time and I am very glad they come to our area for the parents and children to mix as a community."***
>
> ***"I have found the mobile kindergarten a great benefit to all members of my family. The children have gained pre-school education that would not otherwise be available to them. My husband has attended father's sessions which always seemed to be enjoyed very much by both children and fathers and I have enjoyed meeting other mums in the area and working with children. Our kindergarten at Kawakawa Bay is now well established with a lot of equipment bought through various fundraising activities and is a wonderful asset to our community. Lots of fun and learning opportunities for both parents and children - keep up the good work!! We have 'open days' when local people, grannies etc are asked to attend a session and a lot of favourable comment is received back from those who attend. The older members of the community always seem to really enjoy these days - many of those who attend have no family attending the unit but love to come and see what the children are doing."***

However, when parents were asked to comment, in the parent questionnaire, on what they liked least about their mobile unit, some of the parents from Kawakawa Bay (in common with parents from many other areas served by mobile pre-school units) mentioned: low frequency of visits to the area, unpacking the van, and fundraising to buy new equipment for their group, for example:

> ***"Fundraising. Meetings. Cake baking. In a small rural community most services exist [only] because of fundraising/voluntary work by residents. Our school (32 pupils) requires greater parental involvement because of small numbers of parents. There is also the health clinic, again run by a voluntary committee, and church activities [as well]. All take time. Kindy fundraising for 5 hours use weekly sometimes seems unnecessary."***

THE THAMES MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT, THAMES

Introduction

The Thames mobile pre-school unit, based in the town of Thames on the Coromandel Peninsula, opened in 1979. As well as the general policy of ensuring that pre-school education was provided in areas which would otherwise not have been catered for, major reasons for establishing the Thames mobile pre-school unit were that: it was seen as a more viable alternative to erecting an expensive second permanent kindergarten building in Thames, especially when numbers of children fluctuated considerably at that time; it would help reduce the waiting lists at the Thames kindergarten; it would provide an alternative to playcentres in the vicinity of areas to be served by the proposed mobile unit (based on the assumption that not all parents are in a position to give the time needed to help at a playcentre); it would provide support to parents running their own playgroups; and, finally, it would provide pre-school education for country children in the district and for children in areas of the town not well served by public transport.

From the outset, the Thames unit has served four groups, allocating two sessions per week to each group. At the time the fieldwork was carried out (April 1988) the groups were located at: Te Puru, 15 kilometres north of Thames (originally the 'Thames North' group); Kopuarahi, 13 kilometres south; Ngatea, 25 kilometres south-west; and Puriri, 14 kilometres south-east of the town. All four groups were in basically the same localities as those served when the mobile unit began. The map overleaf shows the location of each venue.

The mobile unit's staff of two full-time, trained kindergarten teachers travelled to each location in the unit's Ford Econovan. (As for all mobile units, the van was replaced on a regular basis - about every two to three years.) The teachers travelled a total of 270 kilometres per week (Table 4.1) with a total travel time of around 4 hours 20 minutes, depending on road conditions - heavy rain causes many slips in the Thames area. The van was stored overnight and during weekends at a mechanic's garage in Thames; staff there also serviced the van when required. Teachers were responsible for filling the van with petrol: they sent a running sheet with details of kilometres travelled and petrol purchased to the then Department of Education, Hamilton, on a regular basis.

Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

The Thames mobile pre-school unit was distinctive in that three of its four groups had their own purpose-built accommodation, made possible by the fundraising efforts of parents in the different communities. Buildings which were either exclusively or almost exclusively used by the mobile unit's groups (one group's building doubled as the local primary school's library) meant that a considerable amount of furniture and equipment could be left permanently set-up between sessions. This reduced the need to carry so much equipment in the van. Being able to leave furniture, some equipment, and collage materials set-up or stored at these venues also helped reduce the time taken to get sessions underway. Another benefit of groups having their own buildings was that children's art work, posters etc, could be displayed on the walls, something that was rarely possible in borrowed accommodation. The fourth group (at Puriri) met in the local community hall at the time the fieldwork was carried out but was hoping to move to more suitable accommodation.

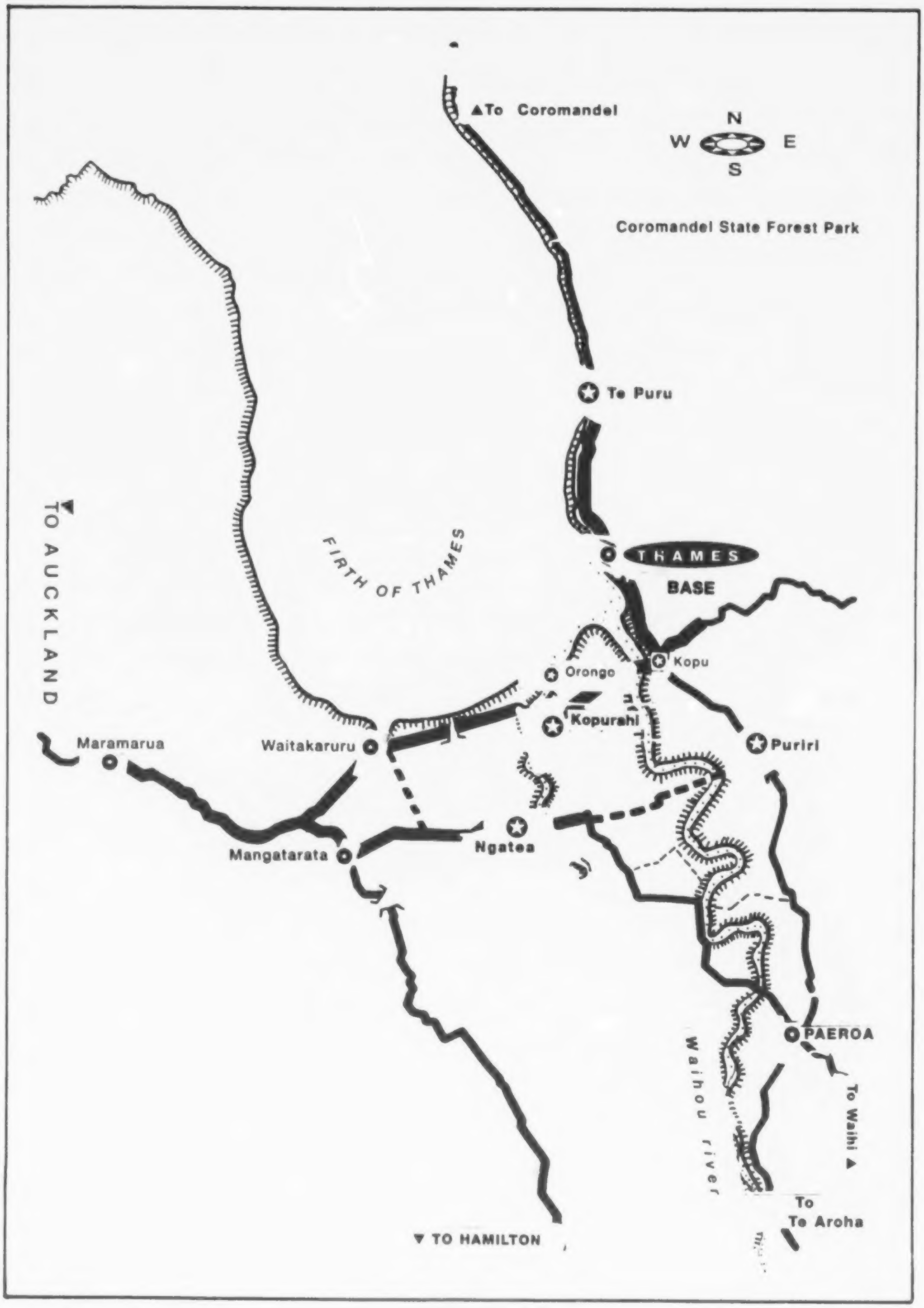
Table 4.1: Distances travelled by the Thames mobile pre-school unit teachers and total travel time per day/week

	Morning destination	Distance travelled (one way) from base (kilometres)	Afternoon destination	Distance travelled from morning destination (kilometres)	Total kilometres travelled per day[a]	Total travel time per day[b] (minutes)
Monday	Te Puru	15	Puriri (from Te Puru)	30	60	60
Tuesday	Kopuarahi	15	Ngatea (from Kopuarahi)	15	60	55
Wednesday	Puriri	15	Base (from Puriri)	15	30	30
Thursday	Ngatea	30	Te Puru (from Ngatea)	45	90	85
Friday	Kopuarahi	15	Base (from Kopuarahi)	15	30	30
Total per week					270 kilometres	260 minutes (4 hours 20 minutes)

[a] Includes distance travelled from afternoon destination back to base.

[b] Time taken to travel depended on road, traffic and weather conditions rather than distance per se. The head teacher commented: "The times are what we allow ourselves due to constant road works (up coast slips after rain). Up to five minutes can be taken off each time if all goes well. Logging trucks and milk tankers are a common thing to follow as well around here. Sometimes I think the pensioners wait until we leave to come out on the road : many retire up here and slow everything down to their pace."

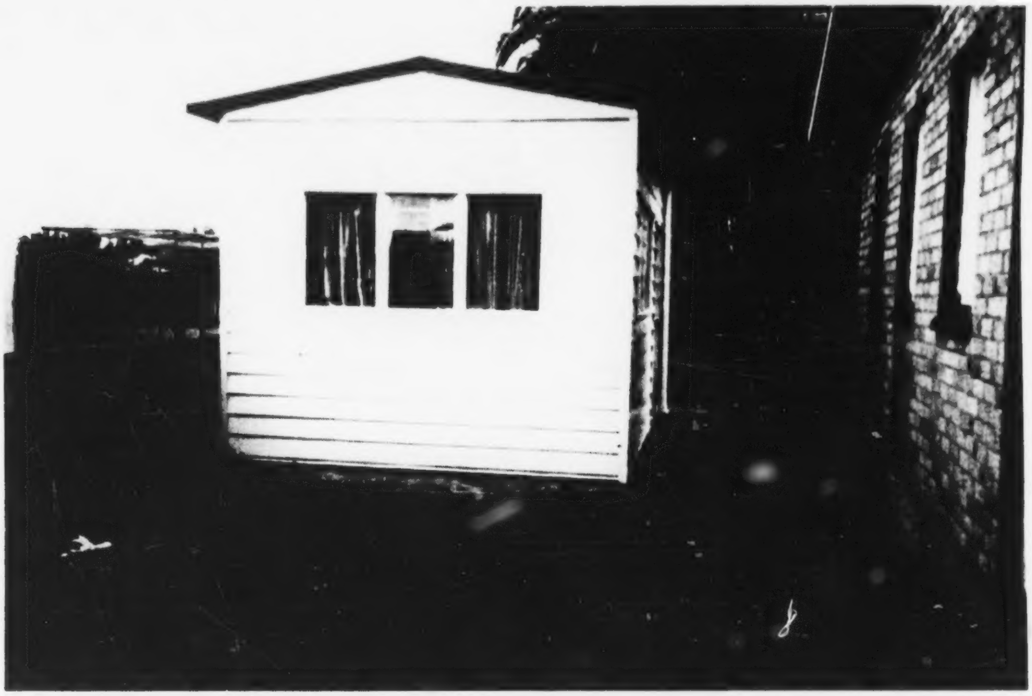
Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit


To Coromandel
N
W
E
S
Coromandel State Forest Park
Te Puru
TO AUCKLAND
FIRTH OF THAMES
THAMES
BASE
Kopu
Orongo
Kopurahi
Puriri
Maramarua
Waitakaruru
Ngatea
Mangatarata
PAEROA
Waihou river
To Waihi
To Te Aroha
TO HAMILTON

Scale 2cm = 5 kilometres

Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

The teachers at the Thames mobile pre-school unit had been provided with a prefabricated shed in which to store equipment and carry out administrative, planning, and preparation work on Wednesday and Friday afternoons. The prefab was located at the rear of the Thames Kindergarten which was close to the centre of Thames. Between sessions, the mobile unit teachers often returned to the Thames Kindergarten to have lunch with the teachers there. As well as being a social time, the mobile unit teachers also found this a valuable opportunity to exchange ideas with other teachers. The mobile unit did not have its own telephone but the teachers were able to make use of the one at the Thames kindergarten when required.



The teachers' office, behind the Thames Kindergarten

The Communities Served by the Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

The areas served by the mobile unit ranged from alternative life-style to farming-based communities. When asked during the interview 'How would you describe the community/communities that the Thames mobile pre-school unit serves?' one teacher commented:

> ***"[The communities are] very mixed except for Ngatea. The Ngatea group is basically people who live in Ngatea or people who are on the farms - they would be***

> ***our most middle-class group... with no real great financial difficulties. [The] Puriri [group] has everything from people who would be in financial difficulties through to those who own their own 30 acre blocks. Te Puru is basically all young parents starting up with their house and their mortgages. Kopuarahi is your couples who have bought farms or are working on farms so you can have farm owners or farm workers there but they mix very well. It is at Ngatea where we have found at times that farm owners and farm workers don't mix quite so well - there is a definite problem there. Quite a lot from the Ngatea group also work in town [ie Ngatea] - they could be the people who own the businesses or the people who work for them or they work at the [local] dairy factory.***
>
> ***None of the families from the Te Puru group are farming people. Most of them work in Thames or at some business around the Thames area or they have their own [business], like there are electricians.***
>
> ***Puriri - basically the most social problems are out there. It is the biggest group of either solo mums or you never know what group to classify them in, it is not low socioeconomic [but] they all left school at fourth form sort of thing, got married, got pregnant or got pregnant then got married but either way everything was done very young and shut off their options."***

The second teacher commented as follows when asked to give her views about the communities served by the mobile unit:

> ***"All four groups are terribly different. Each group has its own needs. The Ngatea group has the biggest cross-section. A lot are farmers, others are employed in town as builders, teachers etc. The Te Puru group has alternative life-stylers, people who work in shops etc in Thames, lots of solo mums. This group has the biggest cross-section financially. The Kopuarahi group are all farmers; Puriri are mainly farmers or abbatoir workers. Quite a few are on the DPB at Te Puru and Puriri. Some find it hard financially. Most don't travel a lot really [ie many do not have a very broad experience of different ways of life etc]."***

When asked the question 'Do the communities that you serve have any specific needs which affect how you work with the children/parents?' one teacher commented that she felt that because children who attended the Puriri group often had problems, it was important to provide stable sessions for them and to ensure that the children knew that the kindergarten was 'theirs'. She felt it was important that they saw it as a place to come to fulfil their own needs. She also felt that sessions provided an important opportunity for families under stress to have somewhere to go outside the home and/or that they allowed pre-schoolers and their mothers/caregivers to have a break from one another.

The other teacher commented that she felt it was important to adapt one's teaching approach for families with financial difficulties because often these children and parents had not had as broad an experience as others. She also felt it was important to be aware that parents cannot always afford things that others might take for granted.

A further question on aspects of the communities visited by the Thames mobile pre-school unit asked teachers: 'Are there any particular events/characteristics of the different communities that you visit which can disrupt sessions?' The first teacher commented that the hall at Puriri became so cold in winter that people often did not turn up until 10am, thus significantly shortening the time that their children could spend at the session. She also commented that attendance at the Ngatea, Puriri, and Kopuarahi groups could be affected during the shearing season and again during lambing or calving time, while attendance at all sessions could sometimes be affected by floods and road slips. (Occasionally, sessions had to be cancelled altogether because the mobile unit's van could not get through to a venue due to adverse road conditions.) The second teacher, too, remarked that a drop-off in attendance was possible amongst those from farming communities during calving time and during the haymaking season.

The Philosophy of the Thames Mobile Pre-School Unit in Relation to Children

The philosophy of the Thames mobile pre-school unit (as at April 1988) in relation to children meant that the teachers broadly followed the approach of the SEACOH[1] (Structured Environment Allowing for Communicative Original Happenings) programme. In a paper by Ann Hatherly (1986) it was stated that:

> **"A major component of the SEACOH programme is the design of the environment. The emphasis on increased accessibility of materials for children has led to a series of alternative designs for kindergarten furniture which are well documented and available as working drawings."**

In her paper, however, Hatherly chose to concentrate on other components of the programme, ie its philosophy and teaching strategies. She thus states:

---

[1] The SEACOH programme was originally devised by Yvonne Adams, District Officer (ECE), Wanganui. It is used mainly in the Thames, Tauranga and Hamilton areas.

> "In the SEACOH programme, taking the art area as an example, tables, easels and the floor become work surfaces. They are not set up before a session with materials for a specific activity. Resources and equipment have to be presented in a way which makes them easily accessible and visible to all children.
>
> ...the emphasis is on enabling the children to carry out the complete process of anything they are working on themselves. This includes deciding the materials they require, cutting them down to size if needed (sharp scissors are essential) and putting all equipment and resources back in the storage areas after use. The teachers must therefore ensure that an extensive variety of resources is available and rather than cutting collage materials (eg fabric) up into small pieces they are left large for the children to cut as required.
>
> Staff will find in the beginning that a lot of their time will be taken up with reinforcing the completion of the process, ie making sure that equipment is put back by the children and that the work spaces are kept clear. A characteristic of a successful SEACOH programme is that, with initial reinforcement, children soon demonstrate an ability to take responsibility for the total process and through modelling the correct behaviour teach their peers the same."

The head teacher said, however, that they did not use 'pure' SEACOH because she felt that if they did the children "would never get anything done". Also, she felt that children do have to be shown or taught some things eg how to use staplers, scissors etc, and that they need to learn to widen their horizons by being invited to try a range of activities. 'Pure' SEACOH, according to the mobile unit teachers' understanding of it, means that teachers do not ask the children to do prescribed activities but just let them initiate everything that happens - ie the children are given the freedom to develop and extend from their own ideas. Also, under the SEACOH system, if children choose not to do anything specific and not to complete some work to take home, this does not matter. This does, however, cause problems with some parents who like to see tangible results of the time their children spend at kindergarten. The head teacher said that they (the teachers) therefore tried to compromise between the SEACOH approach and what parents wanted, for example, by producing name cards for each child and teaching all children to recognise and write their own names before going to school. They felt that this helped 'distract' parents from their desire to have children 'take something home' from each session as evidence of 'work done' or 'achievement'. The head teacher said she also liked to introduce some teacher generated ideas for activities as a further compromise between a totally free play situation and a more structured approach.

Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

(Despite the teachers' compromise with respect to the overall philosophy and teaching strategies of the SEACOH approach, the idea of having increased accessibility of materials for children, as mentioned by Anne Hatherly, seemed to be followed to a large extent at the Thames mobile pre-school. For example, at the Te Puru and Ngatea venues in particular, children undertaking painting and other art work were readily able to help themselves, from specially designed shelves, stands and bins, to collage materials and to a variety of different types of paper.)

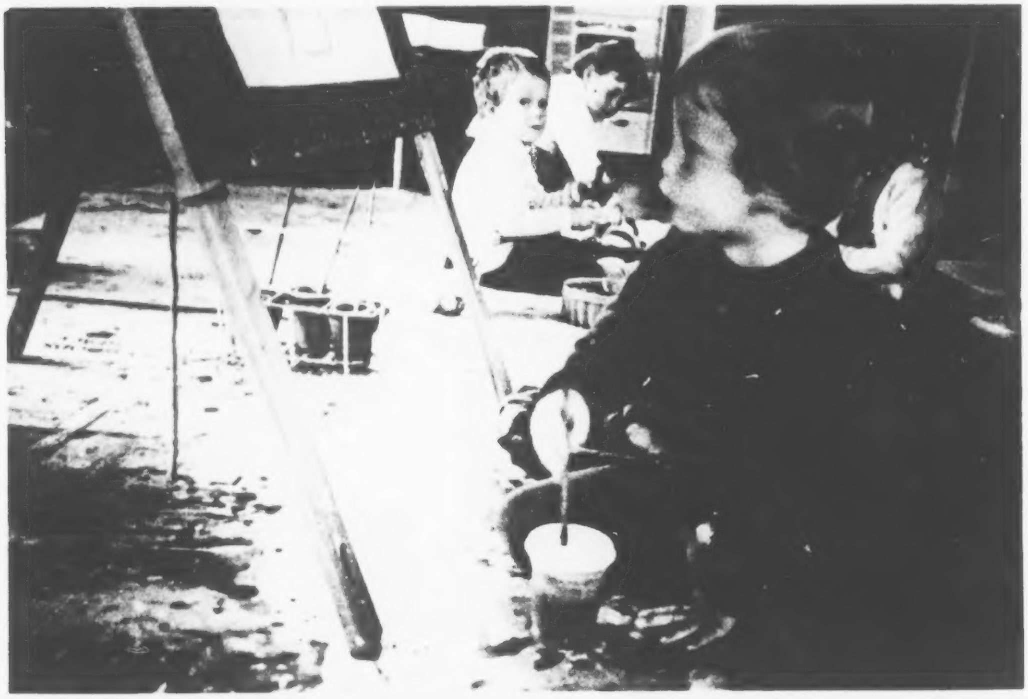
The approach of the Thames mobile pre-school unit was well demonstrated in a book prepared by the head teacher for new parents to read when they first brought their children to a mobile unit session. For example, after explaining that children learn through 'play and active involvement' the book stated 'we want to move away from only adult-directed activities. Your child has the ability to create - not only in the art area, but in all areas of play in a kindergarten'. The book then went on to explain that the kindergarten is a place for children to do their own work and that it is important for them to have a wide range of materials freely available to choose from and a variety of different places (eg floors, not just tables) at which to work.

Finally, when specifically asked during the teacher interviews what their major goals were for working with children in the course of their work on the mobile unit, the teachers had the following to say:

> ***"My priority is social skills - all the intellectual and emotional development and everything else sort of follows on after that - purely because we are dealing with country children who often do not see much of each other, even in this day and age when people are more mobile."***
>
> ***"I try to set up a learning environment so the children can come to their full potential. An environment that is not threatening. You have to be aware of the fact that children have different potential in different areas at different times. Social skill development is important but within certain guidelines - the children have to learn what they can and can't have or do."***

The Children who Attended the Thames Mobile Pre-School Unit

The children who attended the Thames mobile pre-school unit ranged from babies of a few weeks of age to five-year-olds. Very young children were welcomed at three of the four groups - at the fourth, it was preferred that children under three years (with the exception of young children accompanying the parent on duty for that session) did not attend, both because of the large number of children three-and-a-half years and older who attended on a regular basis and because space was limited. At the Thames mobile pre-school all children, regardless of age, were free to participate in anything they could manage although parents were expected to supervise the toddlers themselves. Some toys (eg a posting box) suitable for very young children were also carried in the van.



Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

The numbers of children who were enrolled at each of the mobile unit's groups as at April/May 1988 are shown in Table 4.2, while Table 4.3 shows the numbers of children (including those not 'officially' on the roll) who attended each group during the fieldwork period. The number of children (as recorded by the teachers) at each group in a subsequent week are presented in Table 4.4. Although the maximum roll number for any given group associated with the mobile pre-school unit was 25 children over $3^1/_2$ years, this maximum was sometimes exceeded (by 2-3 children) at the Ngatea group. The head teacher commented: "Because of distance travelled and family circumstances the extras come once or twice a fortnight, or less, so I allow them on the roll."

Teachers reported that all groups had waiting lists (ie for children under three years); these varied from two at one group, to 32 at another (Ngatea).

Table 4.2: The number of families and children enrolled at each of the Thames mobile pre-school groups as at April 1988

Name of group	Number of families enrolled	Number of enrolled children[a]	Younger children belonging to enrolled families who sometimes attended sessions[b]
Te Puru	24	24	8
Puriri	18	20	13
Kopuarahi	13	13	5
Ngatea	29	30	12

[a] 'Enrolled' children were those 3 to 5 years in the case of the Te Puru, Puriri and Kopuarahi groups and 3 $^1/_2$ to 5 years at the Ngatea group.

[b] ie children under 3 years (or 3 $^1/_2$ years for the Ngatea group).

Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

Table 4.3: Number of children present at each session during the fieldwork period at the Thames mobile pre-school unit

Name of group/time	Enrolled children[a]	Non-enrolled children[b]	Total number present
Te Puru (Monday am)	15	4	19
Puriri (Monday pm)	15	3	18
Kopuarahi (Tuesday am)	12	3	15
Ngatea (Tuesday pm)	26	-	28[c]
Puriri (Wednesday am)	16	3	19
Ngatea (Thursday am)	25	3	28
Te Puru (Thursday pm)	11	1	12
Kopuarahi (Friday am)	9	4	13

[a] Children aged 3 to 5 years (or, in the case of the Ngatea group, 3 $^{1}/_{2}$ to 5 years).

[b] That is babies, toddlers and other children under 3 years (or under 3 $^{1}/_{2}$ years for Ngatea).

[c] This figure includes two children over 3 $^{1}/_{2}$ years who were on holiday in the district.

Table 4.4: Number of children present at sessions (as reported by teachers) in the week 18 to 22 April, 1988

Name of group	Enrolled children	Non-enrolled children	Total number present
Te Puru	16	8	24
Puriri	12	3	15
Kopuarahi	9	5	14
Ngatea	23	3	26
Puriri	13	5	18
Ngatea	21	1	22
Te Puru	13	4	17
Kopuarahi	11	4	15

The Parents Associated with the Thames Mobile Pre-School Unit

The aim of the Thames mobile unit was to welcome parents to sessions and to encourage their active participation, but without pressure. The approach of the teachers is well illustrated in the excerpt, on the facing page, from the book compiled by the head teacher as

Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

EXCERPT FROM A BOOK (PREPARED BY THE HEAD TEACHER) GIVEN TO NEW PARENTS AT THE THAMES MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT TO READ

"Parent Participation Guidelines

Parents are important - no parents - no children. We welcome and need you at kindergarten. We want you to enjoy the time you spend with us, sharing experiences with other parents and the teachers, joining in with the children - they love it. If you are not happy and relaxed here please tell us.

This does not mean you have to stay at the session. Everyone needs their own space, kindergarten means 'a child's garden'. It is for the children, it's their place, with teacher control thrown in.

If you do stay at a session could you:

1 Help with aprons when tangles occur.

2 Share your talents eg, bring your spinning wheel, new baby, story reading ability, singing talent.

3 Encourage children to clean up after themselves.

4 Write names on work, help those who want to write their names eg, Stacey not STACEY - not in capitals because when children start to copy their names they need to copy the right lettering.

5 Talk to the children. Talk to other parents. There is a wealth of knowledge and experience sitting next to you. We all need this contact. Children need different language experience.

6 Feel free to get involved with children's play: the sand, water, carpentry, junk-play, adventure play, nature, dramatic, music, puzzles, blocks, finger-painting, collage, arts and crafts.

7 We thank you for the help packing and unpacking. If many do a little it goes easier.

If you have any ideas, talents, or skills to share please tell us. We can all only benefit.
Feel free to come and go. You are always welcome.

HAVE FUN!!"

a source of information for all new parents. New parents were also given a one-page welcome/information sheet which briefly set out the aims of the mobile's groups and provided details about the parent roster, donations, and the need to make their children a material 'book bag' in which to transport borrowed books to and from sessions. It also requested parents to collect their children's paintings and other creative endeavours to take home and, finally, invited parents to share any skills that they had with the group.

Compared to many 'conventional' kindergartens, a large number of parents remained throughout sessions at the four different venues visited by the mobile unit (the teachers estimated that between 25% and 50% of parents were likely to remain), although others were close enough to their homes or to town to return home or to take the opportunity to go shopping and so on. Table 4.5 shows the numbers of parents who were present at sessions observed during the observation week, while Table 4.6 records the number of parents, as reported by the teachers, present the following week.

Table 4.5: Number of parents present at each session during the fieldword period at the Thames mobile pre-school unit

Name of Group	Number of parents present for all or most of session	Number of parents present for part of session	Total number of parents who were involved in some way in the session[a]
Te Puru	9	-	9
Puriri	8	-	8
Kopuarahi	6	2	8
Ngatea	5	2	7
Puriri	9	3	12
Ngatea	3	6	9
Te Puru	4	1	5
Kopuarahi	5	2	7

[a] This group refers to parents who had some input into the session during their stay (eg those who helped to unpack, tidy up, worked with or supervised their own or other children, observed children at play or spent several minutes at least interacting with teachers and/or other parents) and not to parents who came into the kindergarten simply to pick up or drop off their children.

Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

Table 4.6: Number of parents (as reported by teachers) present at sessions in the week following the fieldwork period

Name of group	Number of parents present for all or most of session
Te Puru	10
Puriri	4
Kopuarahi	7
Ngatea	5
Puriri	9
Ngatea	4
Te Puru	8
Kopuarahi	6

From teacher reports, comments made by parents themselves in the parent questionnaires, and from formal and informal observations carried out while visiting the mobile pre-school unit, it was clear that sessions were important social events for many parents. However, as well as interacting with one another and with the teachers, parents also contributed in many ways, both to the session in progress and to the overall running of the mobile unit. The majority of parents who stayed for all or most of a given session carried out 'housekeeping tasks' (helping to unpack and later reload the van) supervised their own and other children, and worked with the children (to varying degrees) on different activities (although the extent to which parents carried out these tasks varied not only between individuals but between groups as well).

In addition to helping out on a more casual basis, one parent was rostered for duty at each session - this worked out to be once or twice a term in most cases. The parent on duty was responsible for unlocking the building, preparing morning or afternoon tea for both children and adults and for providing any other assistance required by the teachers.

The parent group at each venue was responsible for providing the food for the children's morning or afternoon teas; individual children did not bring their own. (The teachers liked to encourage 'healthy eating' and tactfully encouraged parents to provide natural fruit juice and pieces of fruit for the children instead of biscuits, cakes, and junk food. The teachers reported that parents were providing fruit more and more often.)

Cutting grass, cleaning outdoor areas and general maintenance of buildings both inside and out were also the responsibility of each group of parents. In addition, parents associated with the Thames mobile pre-school unit were active fundraisers for new books and other equipment. (The buildings at Te Puru, Kopuarahi and Ngatea were evidence of the success and vigour of parents' fundraising efforts.)

Each group of parents held monthly committee meetings, either in the evenings (Te Puru) or while their children were attending sessions. At such times, parents gathered in a place apart from the children to discuss matters relating to the general running of their group.

The Te Puru parents, the only ones to do so, ran an additional weekly playgroup for their children on a day when the mobile unit did not visit; they also held a music group one afternoon a week.

Thames Mobile Pre-School Unit Sessions

Sessions run by the teachers during the observation period seldom included mat-times or other large group activities (except for the Ngatea group which catered for children whose mean age was higher than that for the other three groups); instead, children were free to choose to participate in activities as they wished. Teachers worked one-to-one with children or with small groups as required; no set inside/outside duties were assigned for teachers at any given session - ie teachers worked where they felt they were most needed at the time.

As well as regular sessions held in each respective group's venue, the Thames mobile pre-school unit also organised visits to places of interest - eg to the zoo, to the new entrants' class at local primary schools, and to a 'regular' town kindergarten - so that children could have the benefit of mixing with other children and playing with equipment which would not normally have been available to them.

Children from all four groups had the opportunity to choose a book from the mobile unit's supply to take home each week; this 'library service' was very popular with both the children and their parents.

Length of Sessions

Morning sessions held by the Thames mobile pre-school unit lasted, on average, for two-and-a-half hours, while afternoon sessions averaged two hours (Table 4.7). Unpacking equipment from the van and setting it up generally took between 10 and 20 minutes, depending on the venue and the nature and range of activities being used on a particular day. Most unpacking was accomplished before the session was due to begin.

Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

Table 4.7: Length of sessions and times sessions began and ended during the fieldwork period

Name of group/time	Time session began[a]	Time session ended	Length of session[b]
Te Puru (Monday am)	9.00am	11.30am	2hrs 30 mins
Puriri (Monday pm)	1.12pm	2.47pm	1hr 34mins
Kopuarahi (Tuesday am)	9.08am	11.30am	2hrs 22 mins
Ngatea (Tuesday pm)	1.05pm	3.00pm	1hr 55 mins
Puriri (Wednesday am)	9.00am	11.28am	2hrs 28 mins
Ngatea (Thursday am)	9.02am	11.25am	2hrs 23 mins
Te Puru (Thursday pm)	1.00pm	3.00pm	2 hours
Kopuarahi (Friday am)	9.00am	11.26am	2hrs 26 mins

[a] This denotes the time at which sufficient equipment had been unpacked and set out to enable the session to get underway. Children customarily involved themselves with activities as soon as they arrived and/or as soon as activities were available. Sometimes, further materials were unpacked and organised after the times given but without disruption to sessions.

[b] Includes time taken to tidy up and pack some equipment during the session (often with children being involved) but does not include time spent on these activities (or on talking to parents) once the session had ended.

Tidying and packing up usually began about 20 minutes before the end of the session, with all or nearly all parents present helping whichever teacher was currently responsible for these duties. Children were free to either help with the cleaning-up process or to continue with what they were doing right until the end of the session. The loading of the van and a final tidy-up were usually completed by the teachers once all children and parents had left.

Equipment and Activities Provided by the Thames Mobile Pre-School Unit

Although teachers on the Thames mobile pre-school unit did not have to carry as much equipment as, for example, teachers on the Southland, Waimate, Hunterville, and Lakeland mobile units (due to three of their four groups having considerable supplies of equipment of their own and also because it was possible to leave materials and furniture at venues between sessions), they always ensured that they had a sufficient supply of the basics (books, puzzles, dough, blocks) to supplement what was available at each group and to give the children the choice of a variety of activities. The teachers were also directly responsible for instigating 'special activities' (eg screenprinting, music) and for supplying ideas and resources for an ongoing 'theme'.

Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

It was noted that the mobile unit did not possess a very extensive collection of Lego or Duplo but the teachers were intending to replenish their stock in the near future, especially as this equipment was always popular with the children. The teachers were also interested in some photos (taken by the researcher) of the water tanks and quadro used by the Southland mobile pre-school unit and, as a result, intended to purchase this equipment for use with their own groups.

The teachers remarked that the main drawback of having to share equipment between groups was discovering, upon arrival at a venue, that they had left a piece of necessary equipment behind at the previous place visited.

Kids
LUV
Kindy

Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

Teachers' Comments on what a 'Typical' Day or Week was Like for Them on the Thames Mobile Pre-School Unit

Teacher 1:

"I pick up the van [from the mechanic's garage where it is stored] between 8.00am and 8.30am [depending on whether] I need to catch up on anything first [ie before going to sessions] then come around here to the [Thames] kindergarten, pick up... [the other teacher] at 8.30am and gather everything out of the office [located at the back of the Thames kindergarten] that we need. Usually we have always left by about 8.40am to drive to wherever we are going [that day] and when we get there we open up and [unpack the van and set-up equipment]. It's down to about 10-15 minutes to actually get everything operational now that we can leave so much behind at the groups. It used to take roughly 20 minutes. Of course you have got the children coming in saying straight away 'I want to do [this], I want to do [that] [ie they get involved in available activities immediately they arrive]. Then we just do whatever is happening that day or whatever comes along [eg] if the children have brought along something of interest - like, oh it is like at Ngatea we are getting quite a lot of tadpoles so we have been doing things about frogs... At 11.15am we start packing up in the morning [sessions]. We are supposed to leave at 11.30am but it doesn't always happen. We try to get away by 11.45am though. Then we come back to Thames kindergarten for lunch, except when we are out on the [Hauraki] plains where we have lunch there at the kindergarten. We get back in the van at 12.45pm [after lunch], go to the next group and do the whole process all over again, hopefully to leave at 3.00pm, first making sure that somebody is there to take the children home. Sometimes they are not always there [for] all sorts [of reasons]. Because everybody has to drive to get to our groups it can be anything from flat tyres through to slips on the road, accidents, [even] the odd one that goes to sleep [and is therefore late collecting her child]."

Teacher 2:

"I find it really interesting. I used to find in a town kindergarten or conventional kindergarten that often by Thursday afternoon things were getting a little bit - well, not tedious but they were the same. I just find that its never like that on the mobile, its always really interesting and really challenging. The groups are so different. Yes, really interesting."

DESCRIPTION OF EACH VENUE VISITED AND SESSIONS HELD BY THE THAMES MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT DURING THE FIELDWORK PERIOD

The following pages describe major features of the facilities used by each of the four groups visited by the Thames mobile pre-school unit and, as a means of bringing the work of the mobile unit to life, give a detailed account of all child-contact sessions held during the observation week.

TE PURU : MONDAY MORNING, 11 APRIL 1988

The first session of the week was held at Te Puru, approximately 15 kilometres north of Thames. The teachers collected the van at 8.35am from the garage where it was stored over the weekend, and arrived at the Te Puru venue at 8.50am. No parents were present at this stage so the teachers unlocked the kindergarten building and unpacked the van by themselves. The session was ready to begin when the first parents and children arrived at 9am.

The Facilities at Te Puru

The Te Puru group had its own purpose-built prefabricated building. The building was considerably smaller than a 'conventional' town kindergarten but, because it was used solely by the Te Puru group, this meant that they could leave furniture, equipment, and children's art work permanently set-up or displayed between sessions.

While not being particularly sunny, the kindergarten received plenty of natural light. It was decorated with bright and pretty wallpaper in a design of red, blue, and green flowers on a white background. Blackboards extended along most of the left hand wall; there were sliding doors to the outside area. Most of the floor was covered with linoleum but the book corner and puzzle areas were carpeted. Lots of children's art work, plus posters and so on were displayed on all four walls. In the entrance way there were pegs for children to hang their coats and bags on and a mural of a smiling crocodile was painted on the inside of the door.

In the middle of the room there was a wooden stand with shelves holding supplies of paper and a blue cupboard containing dressing up clothes. On top of the blue cupboard the teachers had placed a box containing children's art work from previous sessions: a notice on the box requested parents to be sure and collect their children's 'precious paintings' each week.

Front view of the Te Puru group's building

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Rear view of the Te Puru building

Inside at Te Puru

Large cushions were available in one corner for children to sit on while reading or doing puzzles. In the opposite corner, there were shelves of books, more large floor cushions, and a sofa for parents or teachers to sit on when reading or talking to children. Letters of the alphabet were displayed above the french doors which led to the outdoor play area.

A sink, oven, bench, and Zip (hot water) unit had been installed within the main room; this was where the parents prepared morning or afternoon tea. The oven was also used when the teachers organised baking days for the children. Above the sink bench area was a notice board for parents.

There were no toilets in the Te Puru group's building, partly because it would have been too costly to install them and partly because getting permission for another septic tank in the area was difficult. Children used the toilet facilities in the adjacent public park (1-2 minutes walk); teachers or other adults always accompanied the children there, usually waiting until there was a small group who needed to use the facilities rather than going back and forth with just one child at a time.

Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

A small area by a window to the left of the entrance hall had tables where children could sit to do such activities as collage, sponge painting, and working with clay. A table more to the centre of the room was used for dough play.

Dough play at Te Puru

The outdoor play area, which included the equipment described on page 162, consisted of a large, well-fenced area of grass. The play area was adjacent to a public park and a tennis club. There were a number of trees along the fence line.

The Session

At the time the fieldwork was carried out, sessions held at Te Puru were entirely free play, with no large group work at all. This morning was no exception. (The teachers were, however, planning to introduce mid-morning mat-times in the near future.) During the morning, teachers spent their time either with small groups of children or with individual children, as well as chatting to parents from time to time. Only three of the 19 children present were aged between four and five years. (Twelve were 3-4 years while four children were under three years of age. The teachers commented that the age range of any given group had an effect on teaching style and on tasks attempted that day.) The weather was fine, although cold, and children were free to come and go outside as they pleased. The teachers had no set pattern for outside/inside supervision and there was no set 'theme' for the morning.

COMMENTS FROM THE TEACHERS' DIARIES

Location/time/date of session : Te Puru, Monday morning, 18 April, 1988

TEACHER 1

Main activities involved in during session

Top Town circuit with three-quarters of the children (all at various times) - Top Town runs are the in-play at present; read total of six stories during session to groups of four to seven [children] - did all this outside.

Best/worst things about the session

Best - kids played so well when in groups, cooperated.
Worst - having upset parents - it's sad to watch.

The children/aspects of session

To make the [Top Town] circuit all helped, children had ideas to change circuit, children had to wait turn so we didn't have traffic jams or accidents. Good play in sandpit today.

Role of parents

Parents chatted in groups.

General comments

Beautiful day - sunny with a cool wind. Sandpit in the shade so I didn't spend much time there but the children were there.

TEACHER 2

Main activities involved in during session

Spent a great deal of time dealing with parents' problems: death, suicide and sexual molestation. Other than that I worked with small groups - mainly within 'art' type activities. Donations. No inside/outside roster going.

Best/worst things about the session

Worst thing was not being able to spend more time with the children. Also too much time needed supervising toddlers.

Best thing was the screenprinting results. Children are really understanding and enjoying the concept now.

The children/aspects of session

Small groups happily involved within large group activity supervised by ... [the other teacher] or inside painting screenprinting etc.

Perhaps not enough teacher input from me because of parental problems.

When able to work with the children this [ie working on an individual basis with children] was successful. Extending ideas and thoughts through creativity of painting, screenprinting, dyes etc.

Role of parents

No parents were involved in anything other than housekeeping tasks and occassionally fetching a toddler from the climbing frame.

Job satisfaction

I didn't feel I spent enough time with the children. I feel that this is my main role.

General comments

Sunny, fine weather. Able to go straight outside. Lots of mothers and under threes.

Morning tea was a semi-organised time - ie although most children came inside to the table where fruit and drinks were set out at about 9.55am and ate and drank together, it was not a requirement for them to do so and they were able to come and help themselves later if they wanted to. Teachers supervised the morning tea while having their own coffee and chatted to both children and parents. The children were given orange drink and pieces of apple, carrot, and feijoa. They finished their morning tea by 10.05am. The mother on duty later handed out biscuits to children when they were back at play.

At Te Puru, it was customary to set aside time to issue library books to the children, usually shortly before the end of the session. The teachers were finding this to be an inefficient and time-consuming business, however, and they were planning to change the procedure so that all books were issued immediately after morning tea (or the to-be-introduced mat-time) when the children were together as a group.

During this, and all other sessions throughout the week, the mobile pre-school unit teachers had to spend considerable time explaining the 'new' parent donation system to parents. (The system, involving donation envelopes, was already in use in other kindergarten associations but was unfamiliar to parents connected with the Thames mobile pre-school unit. Instead of donation envelopes returned on a regular basis, Thames mobile unit parents were accustomed to just bringing along some money as and when they could in a very informal way.) Both teachers found the time and effort they had to put in during the week to explain the change to parents rather frustrating, especially when the concept was simple and they felt that parents seemed to be unnecessarily confused.

The session today began at 9am and ended at 11.30am, although a few children and parents began leaving at 11.25am.

Equipment Available at the Session

The Te Puru group had a considerable amount of equipment of its own which it had gathered over the years. This was supplemented at each session by what was brought on the mobile unit's van.

The furniture and equipment permanently set up in the Te Puru group's building included: low tables and chairs; a sofa and child-sized bed; blackboards and chalks; large wooden blocks; a large red wooden train, big enough for a child to sit on; a train set; a wooden horse on wheels for smaller children; puzzles; collage materials (wool, pipe-cleaners, shells, straws, silver paper etc); and dressing up clothes. A book corner and a family corner had also been established. The latter contained dolls, dolls' prams, high-chair and cot, soft toys, a play oven, kitchen dresser, telephones, and an adding machine.

Today, what was already available in the kindergarten was supplemented by the following contents of the mobile unit's van: a container of books; a selection of puzzles; dough, plus rolling pins, cutters etc; clay; musical instruments; Lego/Duplo; sponges, and paints for dipping them into; additional collage materials; crayons, felt pens, scissors, sellotape, and paints; and needles, coloured wools, and pieces of hessian.

The Te Puru group had catered for outdoor play by erecting three swings (with tyres for seats), a climbing net, and an extensive wooden climbing platform. There was also a sandpit, a selection of small to large tyres, and a wooden board propped against a large cable reel for climbing purposes. At this session, the teachers' contribution to outside play was a crawl tunnel and a container of equipment for use in the sandpit.

The climbing platform, Te Puru

Teacher and children making use of a large tyre as a place to chat, Te Puru

Activities Children Engaged in During the Session

Throughout the session, different children, either alone or with others, spent their time on two or more of the following: cutting shapes from paper; screenprinting; sewing on pieces of hessian with coloured wools (four children plus a teacher spent 20-25 minutes on this activity); painting (done on a table top because there were no painting easels available); making pictures by using sponges dipped in paint; 'painting' by dribbling paint off cotton buds onto paper; dancing the 'Hoki Toki' together with a teacher; working with dough and/or clay; and taking part in a music group led by one teacher who provided accompaniment on guitar while the children played various other musical instruments and sang.

Several children also listened to stories. A teacher read to children outside while sitting on a cable reel; as well, at least one parent spent time reading to a child.

Most children spent the latter half of the session outside, either listening to stories, as mentioned above, jumping off wooden cable reels, working in the sandpit, using the swings with the help of parents, or playing with a group of others in the crawl tunnel.

Children and crawl tunnel, Te Puru

The Role of Parents During the Session and Interaction between Parents

There were nine parents present for all or most of the session, one of whom was the official parent helper. During the session, several parents interacted with children from time to time and helped the duty parent prepare the morning tea. Mostly, however, the mothers (there were no fathers present) spent the morning chatting to one another and to the teachers. They took the opportunity at one point to swap children's used clothing. Four or five parents helped tidy up at the end of the session.

The parents at this group were reported by teachers to be very 'social' - often, as happened on this occasion, many of them continued chatting together after the teachers had left. The teachers said that if they were not careful they would still be there with parents at 3 o'clock in the afternoon; despite their efforts to leave on time, so as not to be late for the next session, the teachers reported that they were, nevertheless, often late getting away from this group.

The Te Puru Group's Committee Meeting, 7.30pm to 9.25pm, 11 April 1988

The committee for the Te Puru group held an evening meeting once a month in their kindergarten building. The April meeting was scheduled during the fieldwork period which enabled the researcher, at the invitation of the head teacher, to attend.

Ten mothers plus the head teacher (and the researcher) were present at the meeting held on the evening of 11 April 1988. The parents discussed buying new equipment, safety matters, and fundraising. The head teacher then gave her report. She reported that there were 15 girls and 9 boys over three years of age on the rolls for Te Puru and that average attendance at sessions was 14, plus a number of under three year olds.

One mother asked the group what it thought about the idea of having one of the two sessions each week just for children $3^1/_2$ to 5 years old. The other mothers at first agreed with this idea but then changed their minds. After some discussion group members finally decided that, in their next newsletter, they would inform parents that they could continue to bring their under $3^1/_2$ year olds to sessions if they wished but that they would be responsible for looking after and working with these children themselves. This would then leave the teachers free to spend their time working with the older children.

PURIRI : MONDAY AFTERNOON, 11 APRIL 1988

After leaving the morning session at Te Puru the teachers drove to the Thames kindergarten, where their office was located, to have lunch with the teachers there. They then left Thames at approximately 12.40pm to drive to the afternoon session at Puriri, 14 kilometres south-east of Thames.

The Facilities at Puriri

The Puriri group used a local community hall as its meeting place. The hall was big, old, and dusty. It was also cold; the teachers reported that, in winter, attendance was often significantly lower than at other times of the year because the hall became so very cold. As well, rats or mice frequented the hall: their characteristic smell was very evident in the kitchen area.

PURIRI HALL

The Puriri Hall, located on a busy main road

The floor of the hall was wooden which probably contributed to its dustiness; a great deal of dust was collected when the parents swept up at the end of the session. The walls of the hall, however, had recently been painted which freshened things up a little. Long wooden seats (forms) were arranged around the perimeter of the hall; they had also been newly painted.

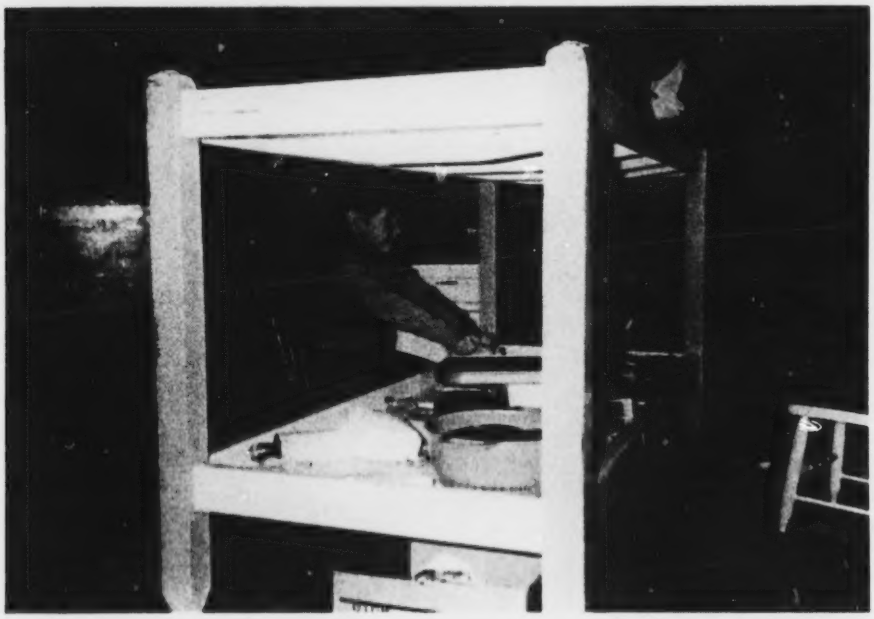
The hall contained a stage but it was not used by the mobile unit's group except as a place to lay paintings to dry. Toilets were located either side of the entrance way to the hall which led almost directly from the road. A long narrow kitchen ran parallel to the main hall.

After making themselves and the teachers a cup of tea, parents tended to spend most of each session in the kitchen chatting together while the children and teachers worked in the main hall or outside. (Parents also held their monthly committee meetings - during session times - in the kitchen, shutting the double doors to the hall to keep the children out.) Access to the outside play area was gained via the kitchen and was the only route outside once the session was in progress.

Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

Because the hall was borrowed accommodation, the group was unable to put up posters or display children's work. Dark red velvet curtains on either side of the stage provided the only colour to the otherwise dull interior of the hall.

Almost the only furniture used during sessions was a single low table and a huge supper trolley, both belonging to the hall. The table was used for painting or drawing and cutting and pasting work, while the lower level of the supper trolley was used for dough play.

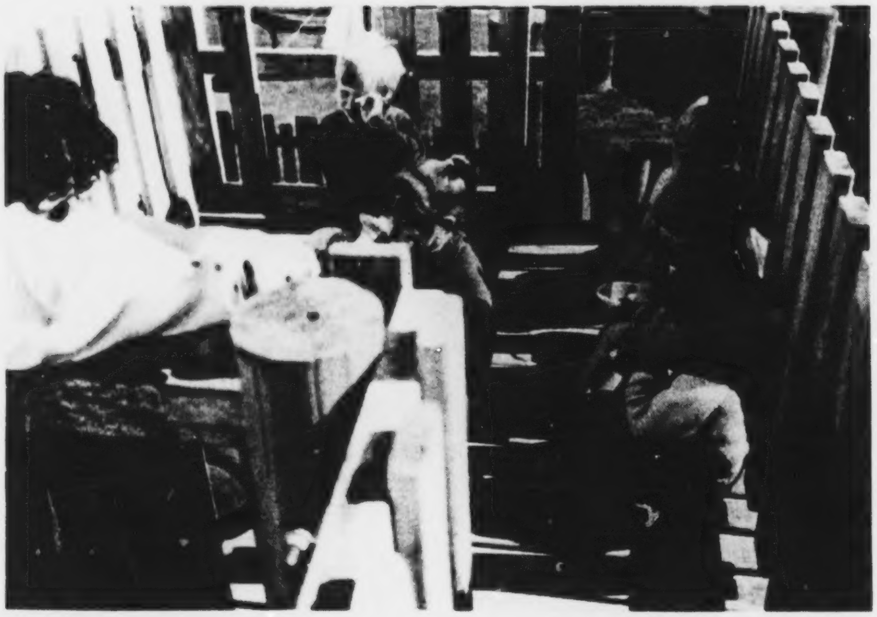


Using the supper trolley for dough play, Puriri

Pots of paint and brushes were placed on small, brightly painted cable reels close to the table, while four low chairs, brought in the van, were placed around the trolley. A number of cushions were also scattered about for the children's use. All other activities inside were done at floor level: three large, rather dusty-looking mats, stored in the small back room of the hall between sessions, were placed on the floor for the children to work on. A large sheet of black polythene, also stored at the hall, was always placed under the table to prevent the floor from getting covered in paint and glue. A notice board for parents, carried in the van, was displayed at each session.

The outdoor play area incorporated a narrow strip of grass along one side of the building, leading to a small play area behind the hall. This area contained a sandpit, kept covered with polythene between sessions, and a large climbing structure built with money raised by parents. The head teacher had been responsible for designing the climbing equipment. She commented that she had designed it to incorporate a little bit of the "fear element" which she said was good for children. The group, however, was intending to have the original ropes replaced by chains. There was very little room for any other outdoor equipment in the space available. A river ran through a gully behind and below the hall and although the outside area was fenced, it probably would not have been difficult for a determined pre-schooler to 'escape' over the fence if she or he felt inclined and if supervision was lacking.

Listening to stories on the climbing structure, Puriri



In the sandpit beneath the climbing structure, Puriri

There was an extremely busy main road - used by a large number of trucks as well as general traffic - immediately in front of the Puriri hall and it was a constant fear of the teachers that a child would one day get out onto the road. They took a great deal of care to ensure that the main door into the hall was kept securely locked during sessions once the majority of parents and children had arrived but proximity to the road was one of several reasons why the teachers thought that this group badly needed a new venue. (About two years previously a five year old child from the nearby primary school was killed by a truck on this road.) The teachers and parents hoped that before too long the Puriri group would be able to get a prefab building in which to meet, to be situated in the primary school grounds.

The Session

The Monday afternoon sessions at Puriri were intended for children aged three years or over only. (This suggested restriction did not apply for the Wednesday morning sessions at this venue.) Some parents, however, still brought their under-three-year-olds with them; there were three such children present at this particular session.

Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

Although scheduled to begin at 1pm, the session did not get fully underway until approximately 1.15pm. This was because almost all who attended were late in arriving.

The session was mainly free play, incorporating small group work and some one-to-one interactions between children and teachers. More 'teaching' per se (eg in relation to learning names, discussing content of books, etc) was evident at this session than at the morning session at Te Puru, probably because the general age level of the children was higher.

The 18 children present, including the three very young children, washed their hands for afternoon tea shortly before 2 o'clock. One child, reported by the teachers to have behaviour problems, screamed because he did not want to go on the mat with the other children. The teachers made sure that he did, though, by calming him down and talking him around. They felt it was important for him to stay on the mat for the short time involved. When all children were finally sitting together they were given pieces of apple and feijoa to eat. Afternoon tea-time was the only occasion the children, plus both teachers, were all together as a group during the session. While the children were eating, the head teacher told them to be sure to wear warm clothes to the Wednesday morning session because with winter coming the hall was getting very cold; she also explained why one child was soon going to hospital. Following afternoon tea, which lasted until 2.06pm, one teacher went outside and read stories to different children, while the other teacher stayed inside and concentrated mainly on children who were working with clay. Other children returned to the various activities described below.

The session ended at 2.47pm, earlier than its scheduled time of 3 o'clock. Parents at this session customarily left early in order to be home in time to meet school children.

Equipment Available at Puriri

The equipment which was provided at this session included: collage materials plus scissors, staplers, glue and sellotape; big wooden blocks (left on the tea trolley in the hall between sessions); chalks, paints, crayons, paper; some Lego/Duplo and other similar equipment all together in one container; dough, rolling pins, biscuit cutters, and play oven for cooking dough cakes; books and puzzles; magnetised cards with children's names on them; toys, such as rattles for the very youngest children; and outdoor equipment - ie the big wooden climbing structure with slide and swing attached, the sandpit plus metal trucks, spades, buckets etc; and, finally, the crawl tunnel belonging to the Thames mobile pre-school unit as a whole.

COMMENTS FROM THE TEACHERS' DIARIES

Location/time/date of session : Puriri, Monday afternoon, 18 April 1988

TEACHER 1

Main activities involved in during session

Outside. Small group work in sandpit, reading, singing. I was outside from 1.30pm to 2.45pm. Children drifted in and out, some stayed out in sandpit for whole time.

Best/worst things about the session

Best - play was constructive and it flowed.

Worst - a new 3 $^1/_2$ year old - I could not encourage her to get involved with others until last 15 minutes or so, then she listened to a story and participated.

The children/aspects of session

Children played in sandpit very well. I read six stories during the afternoon, did fingerplays but these did not lead into any play.

Play flowed well. Any aggression building I feel I diverted before it became a problem.

General comments

Weather - lovely afternoon. Badminton has begun [ie, for parents] so that can influence attendance.

TEACHER 2

Main activities involved in during session

One-to-one. Small group music and movement. Spent all session inside. (No outside/inside roster). Donations and signing permission slips for school visit.

Spent a complete session (except for donations) with children!!!

Best/worst things about the session

Best thing was being able to extend the children and follow one concept through to the next step, dimension eg doing the whole screenprinting process, also drawing with crayon then using dye.

The children/aspects of session

Excellent music group. Able to extend children's movement, ideas and language.

Fairly small group of 'older' children. Plenty of one-to-one.

Role of parents

Housekeeping only.

General comments

Fine weather. Session supposed to be for three years and over only.

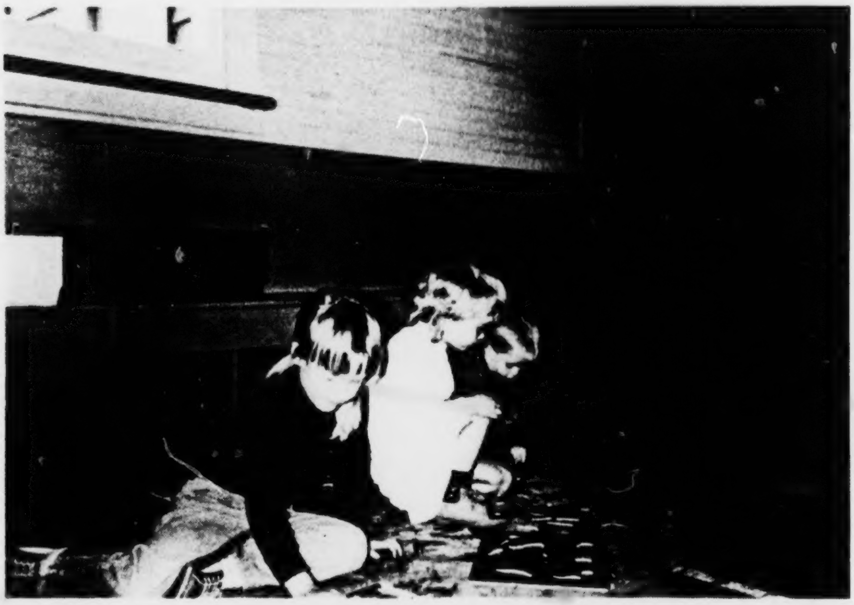
I find having less parents present enables me to become more involved in my role as teacher therefore I'm able to extend the children more, especially in this session which is supposed to be geared to the older children.

Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

Compared to the other three groups visited by the mobile unit, this group did not possess a great deal of equipment - what was available (not counting the activities brought in the van) was rather old and unexciting, except for the outdoor climbing equipment which was excellent.

Activities which One or More Children Engaged in During the Session

During the session a small group of children, together with a teacher, gathered on the top platform of the climbing structure to listen to stories; children came and went as they pleased over an approximately 30 minute period. It was considerably warmer outside in the sun when sheltered from the wind than it was in the hall and several children, as well as listening to stories, spent a greater part of the afternoon working in the sandpit. In addition, children variously spent their time working with a teacher identifying their own names from the pile of magnetised cards (children were invited to do this by the teachers); working with dough and/or clay either alone or with others; painting - at floor level because there were no easels; cutting and pasting (eg making a mask) and doing other collage work; 'painting' with sponges dipped in paint; completing puzzles with the help of a teacher; and helping to sweep and tidy up at the end of the session.



Inside the Puriri Hall

Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

After today's two sessions at the Thames mobile pre-school unit the researcher felt that there was more associative play occurring (eg in the sandpit and at the dough table) than had been the case at some of the other mobile units visited. This may have been because children attending the Thames unit saw each other twice rather than only once a week.

The Role of Parents During the Session and their Interactions with One Another and with the Teachers

Several parents, including two fathers, stayed only long enough to drop off or pick up their children; most, however, had a brief chat to teachers and/or other parents before leaving.

The parent on duty helped set up equipment at the beginning of the session and was responsible for the afternoon tea preparations. Seven other parents who remained throughout the session mainly chatted to one another, except for occasionally supervising and responding to initiations from their children. From 2.40pm, five parents helped to tidy up and stack equipment ready for the van.

One teacher spent about 15 minutes talking to a parent about her (the parent's) personal problems. Both teachers also spent considerable time explaining the 'new' system of donations to parents.

KOPUARAHI : TUESDAY MORNING, 12 APRIL 1988

The teachers left Thames at 8.33am to make the 22 minute drive to the Tuesday morning session at Kopuarahi, 13 kilometres south of Thames. The van arrived at the venue at 8.55am and the session was underway shortly after 9 o'clock. There was a total of 15 children present, including two babies and a toddler.

The Facilities at Kopuarahi

The Kopuarahi group met in a purpose-built prefabricated building which it owned jointly with the local primary school. The latter used the building as its library when the mobile pre-school was not occupying it. The building had been paid for with money raised by the local community during the hay-making season.

The Kopuarahi building located in the grounds of the local primary school

The group stored a considerable amount of equipment (eg collage materials, paper, dressing up clothes, large blocks, and other toys) in a large cupboard between sessions.

Two walls of the building were entirely taken up with shelves of library books for the primary school children. Remaining walls were painted blue and the ceiling white. Although none of the kindergarten children's art work was displayed, the shelves of books and a few posters made the room seem cheerful and bright. The notice board for parents was displayed. The floor of the building was half carpet and half linoleum; there were also mats spread about.

The building was rectangular in shape. Sliding french doors led out from one of the longest walls onto a gravel area in front of the building where the van was parked. Beyond the gravel area was a large expanse of grass with trees - part of the school grounds - which contained a trampoline, climbing frames, and the kindergarten's sandpit. At the rear of the building was a large playing field but this was not part of the kindergarten children's 'territory'. The entire school grounds were extensive but well fenced.

At one end of the room there was a sink bench, cupboards, and oven. Next to the kitchen area was a small entrance hall although this did not seem to be used by the group to enter

Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

Inside the Kopuarahi group's building

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the building. Instead, children's paintings were hung there on racks to dry. To the left of the entrance hall was the large storage cupboard, mentioned above, used by the mobile unit. At the opposite end of the building, near a large window, was an area recognised as the 'parents' corner': there was a table and some box seats where parents could, and generally did, congregate to chat and tend to their babies or toddlers. This area was carpeted; small children, therefore, could comfortably be put on the floor if necessary.

There was very little other furniture in the room and most activities were done at floor level. The furniture available included a low table for dough play, painted cable reels on which to place clay and screenprinting materials, and painting easels. Large pieces of heavy cardboard were placed on the floor before children began painting or glueing.

The children used the school's toilets as the kindergarten building did not have bathroom facilities. The teachers had a large plastic basin of water with soap and cloths available so that children could wash their hands before morning tea.

The Session

As for the previous two sessions at Te Puru and Puriri, the session at Kopuarahi involved mainly free play with small group work and some one-to-one interactions between children and teachers throughout the morning. The equipment and activities available at the session are detailed below. The weather was at first overcast with a cool wind but the sun came out part way through the session enabling the children to choose outdoor activities if they wished.

After washing their hands for morning tea about 10am, the children all had their snack of orange juice and biscuits together, standing around a table. The teachers had their coffee at the same time and, as well as overseeing the children, chatted to them and to the parents.

A group (9 or 10) of school children came to visit the kindergarten during their morning break; this was a regular occurrence. They immediately began painting, working with the dough, and with any of the other available equipment and activities. They left at 10.37am, after about 15 minutes of whirlwind activity and every appearance of having enjoyed themselves greatly.

COMMENTS FROM TEACHERS' DIARIES

Location/time/date of session : Kopuarahi, Tuesday morning, 19 April 1988

TEACHER 1

Main activities involved in during session

Story reading, carpentry, sandpit and outside play.

Best/worst things about the session

Best - cooperative play. Good results from screenprinting being done now, kids pleased with their own work. A boy who used to have violent behaviour is now sharing toys in sandpit and cooperative play with others.

TEACHER 2

Main activities involved in during session

Extending children with their choice of work.

Best/worst things about the session

Worst thing is the parents talking amongst themselves loudly while I am trying to take the group for a story and singing.

The children/aspects of session

[This is a] small group always and this makes supervision easier. Lots of parents to look after toddlers.

Small group therefore one-to-one always more evident.

[Children] often become aggressive when school children join in our programme during their 'play' time.

Job Satisfaction

Still feel that more planning would extend these children, especially being such a small group.

Role of parents

Housekeeping only.

Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

The head teacher spent some 20 minutes during the session carrying out administrative duties. This required her to use the telephone in the school's office and therefore meant being absent from the session itself during that period. Throughout the head teacher's absence, the other teacher worked with children inside while parents closely supervised children on the trampoline outside.

One teacher began tidying up at 11.09am as well as continuing to interact with the children and parents. Children became involved in the tidying up process from 11.17am. The session ended at 11.30am and parents and children left soon afterwards.

Equipment Available

The equipment made available during the morning was a combination of materials brought in the mobile unit's van and those belonging to the Kopuarahi group itself. Unlike for sessions at Te Puru and Ngatea, however, most of the equipment used at this session was brought in the van. This consisted of: paints, easels, paper and brushes; dough set out on a table together with rolling pins, boards, and shapes for cutting and shaping the dough; clay placed on top of a blue painted cable reel; books, puzzles, and early maths games; large wooden blocks; a wide selection of collage materials, felt pens, crayons, scissors, and sellotape; carpentry table plus wood, hammers, and nails; sponges, paint rollers, and bright green paint; magnetised name cards; and musical instruments (eg castanets, recorders, and shakers). The mobile pre-school unit also provided a few toys, such as a posting box, suitable for the very young children.

Finally, as well as outdoor equipment belonging to the school (ie trampoline, metal climbing frames, and a slide) but available to the mobile pre-school group, there was a sandpit built especially for the pre-schoolers, plus the crawl tunnel and a trolley from the van.

Activities which One or More Children Engaged in During the Session

Children divided their time between activities which they could do with or without adult involvement (eg looking at books, doing puzzles, and playing with other children) and activities which were either teacher initiated or required adult assistance. For instance, several children and a teacher played maths and other games with cards depicting trucks, cars, and other vehicles. During these games, children practised concepts such as 'in', 'out', 'underneath', 'in front of', and 'behind' with the teacher. Most children also spent a short time on a one-to-one basis with a teacher learning to recognise their own names from a selection of cards: the cards had magnets attached to the back of them and were displayed on the door of the oven once each child had picked out his or her name.

Other activities involving teachers were: screenprinting; listening to stories; singing and playing musical instruments while the teacher accompanied them on guitar and gave directions and explanations; choosing a library book and having it issued by the teacher; and simply having a conversation with one or both teachers at different times.

Additional activities - not necessarily requiring teacher assistance or supervision, although often attracting teacher interest - which children chose to do, mainly during the first half of the morning, included cutting shapes out of paper, working with dough or clay, painting, making designs on paper using either a paint roller or sponges dipped in bright green paint, and working at the carpentry bench nailing pieces of wood together to make aeroplanes and other objects. Several children also made good use of the collage materials which were available. Today, a parent had added a selection of shells to the collection. The children were not told what they might do with the shells. The teachers were therefore delighted when the children spontaneously began to paint faces on the shells and/or to decorate them with bright colours and designs.

After morning tea, although some children continued to work inside, most chose to spent the greater part of their time outside. Immediately after they had had their snack, a teacher accompanied several children who had requested to use the slide. She then supervised until all children had had two or three turns each. Using the slide, which was part of a large, very high wooden climbing structure belonging to the school, was a very popular activity with the children and it was seldom that a session at Kopuarahi passed without teachers being asked to accompany a group there. The children were under strict instructions never to go without a teacher because of the height of the slide and because it was out of sight and quite some distance from the kindergarten. The teachers reported that they had never had a child break this rule. Outdoor play at the session also included playing on the school's trampoline and climbing frames, under the supervision of parents and one teacher, and working in the sandpit.

The Role of Parents During the Session and Interaction between Parents

Six parents were present for all of this morning's session. Two further parents were present for part of the morning: they helped unpack and spent some minutes chatting to other parents before leaving. One returned at 11.20am to help tidy up.

Collage work, Kopuarahi (Note magnetised name cards on oven door in background)

A child about to make a screenprint, Kopuarahi

During the first part of the morning five parents sat around a table in the 'parents' corner' chatting and completing the parent questionnaires (for the present study) which had been given out to them at the beginning of the session; they also supervised the two babies and the toddler who were with them. The sixth parent - the parent on duty - prepared the morning tea.

Later in the morning, three parents were observed sorting out a box of children's art work which had been completed at previous sessions, while two other parents spent some time organising the ingredients for the baking activity planned for the following Friday and making a note of what they would have to buy. (The parents customarily paid for the ingredients.) Two parents spent around five minutes working with children doing puzzles while four parents supervised children playing outside for 20-25 minutes (during the time the head teacher was using the phone in the school).

Apart from the above-mentioned housekeeping and supervisory duties, the session was primarily a social occasion for parents. They appeared to be very friendly with one another and with the teachers; there was a lot of laughing.

NGATEA : TUESDAY AFTERNOON, 12 APRIL 1988

The fourth group to be visited each week by the Thames mobile pre-school unit was at Ngatea, 25 kilometres south-west of Thames. The teachers drove straight to Ngatea from the morning session at Kopuarahi - about 12 minutes drive - and ate their lunch in the Ngatea group's building before beginning the afternoon session. The Ngatea group was the largest of those served by the Thames mobile pre-school unit with an average attendance of 25 children over $3^1/_2$ years. (The attendance figure for the session observed today was 28 children. Two of the children were visitors to the area.)

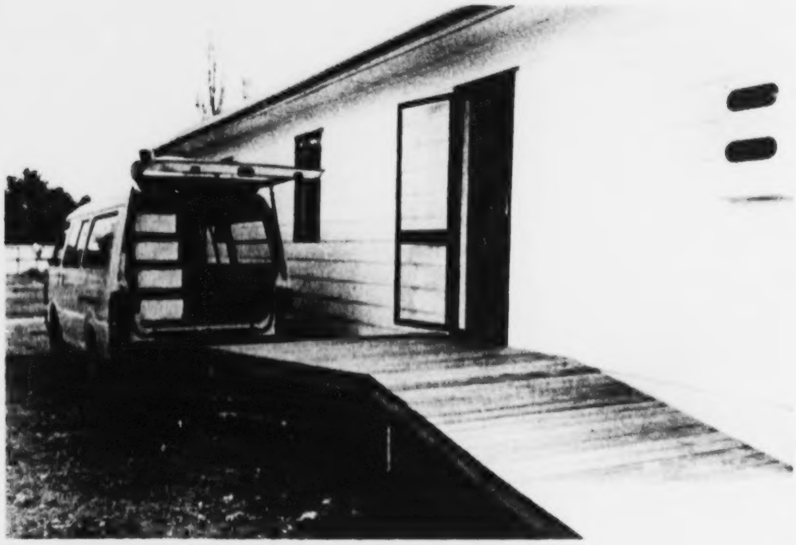
As the Ngatea group catered for $3^1/_2$ to 5 year olds, the teachers tried to incorporate some more structured activities into sessions (eg mat-times where stories were read to the entire group) than was the case for the other three groups that they visited.

The Facilities at Ngatea

Like Te Puru and Kopuarahi, the Ngatea group had its own specially built accommodation, paid for with money from parents' fundraising efforts. The building was for the sole use of the mobile group. At the time the fieldwork was carried out the building had only been open for a few months; it was officially opened in November 1987. (The group had previously met in a local community hall.)

The building, decorated with off-white wallpaper and orange curtains was light, bright, and sunny. The floor had been polyurethaned but one corner, where mat-times took place, was carpeted. There were also a number of mats scattered around, for example, where the puzzles were set out.

At the rear of the building there was a ramp leading up to the door; the van could be backed up to the ramp to facilitate unloading. (One limitation of the ramp, though, was that there was quite a drop - one metre at least - from the highest side, which was not particularly suitable in a place designed for young children.)



The mobile unit's van at the rear entrance to the Ngatea group's building

At one end of the rectangular-shaped building was a kitchen with sink, cupboards, fridge and oven. The bathroom facilities were nearby. At the opposite end of the room was the family corner (separated from the rest of the room by low screens covered with a bright and attractive nursery print in yellow, green, red, purple, and blue) and the area where mat-times were held. The mat-time area contained an arm-chair upholstered in the same fabric as that used on the screens around the family corner, plus a number of large floor cushions. There were blackboards on the wall near the mat area.

Immediately opposite the back entrance were french doors which opened onto the outside playing area in front of the kindergarten - a large, securely fenced area of grass containing an extensive, well-constructed sandpit. Private houses and a building belonging to a manufacturer surrounded three sides of the group's play area.

Front view of the Ngatea building, showing a section of the sandpit

The group had a good supply of its own equipment which was left permanently set up in the building. There was, for example, a permanent book-stand (from which books could be borrowed on a lending-library basis) and a variety of equipment in the family corner, including telephones, an adding machine, iron and ironing board, dressing up clothes, cot, high chair, a dolls' sun-chair and bed, and an oven. A number of posters and examples of children's art work were displayed on the walls in the family corner and the dough table was also placed in that area.

The Ngatea group had a fish tank cared for by parents and also an ant colony, although this was dead at the time the fieldwork was carried out. There were a number of free standing shelves around the room, plus others against the walls, which contained paper and equipment such as large wooden blocks.

There were several bins containing collage materials. Some small brightly painted cable reels on which to place equipment (eg phones) and specially designed 'carousels' were available to carry paints, brushes, and containers of felt pens. Low wooden tables were placed around the room for children to work at when doing collage and other art or construction work.

Ngatea parents had put a great deal of effort and care into making their building bright and welcoming for children and into gathering a variety of interesting activities. The only limitation of the building (which would be a major drawback if the group achieved its aim and became a permanent kindergarten) was that it was small: if most children plus several parents were all inside at once conditions would be very cramped and also very noisy.

The Session

The session was a combination of free play and small and large group work.

During the first part of the session, a major teacher-led activity was the music group which gathered outside on the grass - so as not to disrupt or be disrupted by other children or adults working inside - from about 1.20pm to 1.42pm. The number of children who participated in the music group varied, with a maximum of 15 children at any given time. While the teacher accompanied them on guitar, the children who participated sang, danced, did action songs and exercises, and played maraccas, tambourines, and xylophones (after first learning about features of different musical instruments).

Children washed their hands for afternoon tea at 2.08pm before all sitting together on the mat to have their fruit and juice. Afternoon tea time lasted for about five minutes and was followed by stories being read to the entire group from 2.14pm to 2.19pm. (Of the four groups visited by the Thames mobile unit, Ngatea was the only one where some sort of mat-time or large group session was held on a regular basis.)

After their story all but three of the children went outside to join in a large circle for games such as 'Punchinella' and 'What's the time Mr Wolf', and to dance the 'Hoki Toki', a very popular pastime amongst pre-schoolers. These activities, led by both teachers, lasted until 2.34pm. One of the teachers had invited children to stay inside if they wished to do activities such as cutting out but the majority wanted to go outside and join in with the rest of the group. Of the three who did not join in, two spent their time in the sandpit while one child sat in a trolley and just watched.

In the sandpit at Ngatea (private house in background)

Many children were fully involved in the tidying up process from about 2.47pm. The session ended at 3 o'clock although both teachers were still talking to a parent at 3.06pm and half a dozen children and their parents continued to 'socialise' at the venue for several more minutes.

Equipment and Activities Available for the Children

To supplement equipment which belonged to the Ngatea group and was left permanently in the building, the teachers added materials from the van which they wished to use for today's session. These included: puzzles, set out on mats on the floor; screenprinting materials; painting easels, and paints placed nearby on a carousel made for the purpose; paper, paint rollers and felt pens; dough, plus the usual tools and a play oven in which to cook dough cakes; Lego/Duplo; a variety of collage materials from the van to supplement those already available; sellotape, scissors, and staplers; and musical instruments and books.

COMMENTS FROM TEACHERS' DIARIES

Location/time/date of session : Ngatea, Tuesday afternoon, 19 April 1988

TEACHER 1

Main activities involved in during session

Stories, singing, dancing, another Top Town circuit, puzzles. I had a growl about sandpit rules.

Best/worst things about the session

Worst - J. created a bit of havoc in the sandpit. Sorted that out, then at mat-time had a growl about rules. Kids involved, banned from sandpit that day.

TEACHER 2

Main activities involved in during session

Introducing theme "zoo animals" - I introduced activities as a build-up to our zoo visit next week. Lots of children involved and they all completed what they were making with thought. Large group music activity.

Spent most of the session with children. Main contact with parents was guidance on books to buy from 'book stall'.

Best/worst things about the session

Best things were spending a large part of the time with children within a specific planned activity.

The children/aspects of session

This [ie, one-to-one interaction with children] was evident but I found I had at times a large number of children at each activity making it difficult for one-to-one. I find this is often the case at Ngatea with a large roll and only coming twice a week.

Still no roster for an inside and outside teacher therefore there may be both teachers within one area.

Job satisfaction

Very pleased with interaction with children.

Role of parents

Housekeeping only.

General comments

Bookstall for fundraising set-up at location therefore less room for children. Donations completed incorrectly [by parents].

Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

Provision for outdoor play included the group's very large, well planned and constructed sandpit plus the mobile unit's box of metal trucks, spades and other tools for using in the sandpit, two trolleys belonging to the Ngatea group, and the crawl tunnel.

Activities which Children Took Part in at the Session

Although the weather was breezy and cool during the first half of the afternoon the children were able to play either inside or outside as they wished. A major attraction was the sandpit where several children spent almost all their time until mat-time. Apart from the music group mentioned above, most other children variously spent their time working with dough, painting, drawing with felt pens, cutting out their own body shapes drawn onto paper, doing collage work, completing puzzles, and/or looking at books.

The puzzle corner, Ngatea

As well as the story read to the entire group at mat-time, one teacher related, to a group of seven children, a story based on a scrapbook containing children's paintings. Some children also spent considerable time before afternoon tea playing in the family corner, for example, talking on the telephone. At one point, a little girl was observed having an animated, and bossy, 'conversation' on the phone. One teacher remarked that she sounded "just like her mother!"

After mat-time, the weather became sunny and calm. Almost all children chose to join in the large group doing the 'Hoki Toki' led by both teachers. Shortly before the end of the session, a group of three children watched a teacher feeding the fish and then spent several minutes discussing the fish with her.

The Role of Parents During the Session and Interaction between Parents

Today, most parents attended the Ngatea group's monthly committee meeting which was held at someone's home while the session was underway. There were, however, five parents (no fathers) who remained for all of the session and two parents who remained for part of the session. A number of other parents came and went throughout the afternoon but stayed only briefly.

Two parents washed dishes and prepared the afternoon tea and around six parents helped pack up from 2.50pm. One very pregnant woman supervised the children in the sandpit; at others times, she just observed the children at play. Mostly, the parents spent their time talking to one another and doing housekeeping tasks rather than working with the children, although two mothers were observed helping children with puzzles for a short time.

Parents also chatted informally to the teachers and engaged in some discussion about changes in the parent donation system. The overall impression gained was that parents were very friendly with one another and with the teachers.

PURIRI : WEDNESDAY MORNING, 13 APRIL 1988

Nineteen children were present at Puriri's second session for the week. Three of these children were under three years of age. The parent on roster duty for the morning arrived in time to help the teachers unpack the van and the three children who had accompanied her began working with puzzles the moment these became available (9am). Other children did not arrive until some time later. During part of the session, the parents held their monthly committee meeting in the kitchen area of the Puriri hall. (The facilities at Puriri have already been described on page 165 following).

It was sunny but cool in the early part of the morning. Later it became warm, making it very pleasant in the outdoor play area behind the hall with the sun shining and the sound of the river in the background. It was significantly colder inside: the researcher found it very cold. Because it was so cold in the hall many children and adults went outside once the parent committee meeting was over, although a few children were keen to continue with activities such as screenprinting, collage, and clay work inside.

Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

The Session

The session began slowly with still only three children present at 9.15am. The teachers devoted their time to these children, however, until all 19 children eventually arrived. Almost all were present by 9.25am.

The session was mostly free play with small group work and some one-to-one interactions between teachers and children. There was no mat-time as such and the only occasion all the children were together was for a brief time mid-morning while they ate their fruit and had their drink. One of the teachers took a music session just after morning tea-time which was the nearest that any activity came to being a large group activity - and this was only because the head teacher and all parents were having a meeting in the kitchen and were not available to work with or supervise any of the children. Tidy-up time began about 11.12am; only some children helped with this task from the outset (others continued with their chosen activities) but by the end of the session almost all children were helping.

During the morning, teachers spent considerable time discussing changes to the donation system with a number of parents; they also had to spend some time doing associated paperwork.

Children and parents began leaving at 11.28am; most had gone by 11.30am. After a final tidy-up and check of the van's contents the teachers left at 11.36am.

Equipment Available

In addition to equipment available at the Monday afternoon session there were screenprinting materials (set out on a board laid between two chairs so that the very young children did not sit on or fall into the paint tray), musical instruments, and the carpentry table, with hammers, nails, and wood.

Dressing up clothes, dolls and various pieces of dolls' furniture, all of which were stored at the hall, were also made available.

Carpentry at Puriri

Activities Children Engaged in During the Session

Children variously spent their time painting at a low table, screenprinting, doing carpentry and/or collage work, listening to stories, working with puzzles and with Lego, learning to recognise their names with the help of a teacher, playing in the crawl tunnel which was kept inside at this session, dressing up and playing with dolls, using the swing (sometimes being pushed by a parent), working in the sandpit, and climbing on the outdoor equipment. While the head teacher attended the parent committee meeting, the other teacher led a music group outside with all but the three toddlers, who stayed with their mothers at the meeting, joining in. Finally, most children helped tidy up at the end of the morning.

COMMENTS FROM TEACHERS' DIARIES

Location/time/date of session : Puriri, Wednesday morning, 20 April 1988

The Puriri group visited Paeroa Kindergarten (approx 40 kms from Thames) at this session instead of meeting at their usual venue.

TEACHER 1

Main activities involved in during session

Talking to parents, introducing our children to the teachers and environment - eg animals, fish, birds, the equipment. Supervising our kids on zoom slide - plenty of chat there.

Best/worst things about the session

Worst - our kindergarten mum who is 'drying out' (we hope) from alcohol arrived aggressive. But I watched her, spoke to her, so did another mum (her friend). Her friend stayed by her all the time. She was happier by the time we left.

The children/aspects of session

Five teachers at this session. Couldn't help but chat, extend, reassure everyone.

Mobile children love a 'real' kindergarten. So much to see and do all at the same time. Outside climbing frame, sandpit etc, gets hammered by our kids.

Role of parents

They enjoyed the surroundings [at Paeroa Kindergarten] with their kids.

General comments

Weather was great. Not all the children came [ie on the visit to Paeroa Kindergarten] which was a shame as they would have enjoyed it.

TEACHER 2

Main activities involved in during session

Trip to Paeroa Kindergarten. Met parents there. Also spent time with Paeroa Kindergarten staff and children. Quite a lot of time spent discussing different aspects of Paeroa Kindergarten's programme with the Puriri parents.

Best/worst things about the session

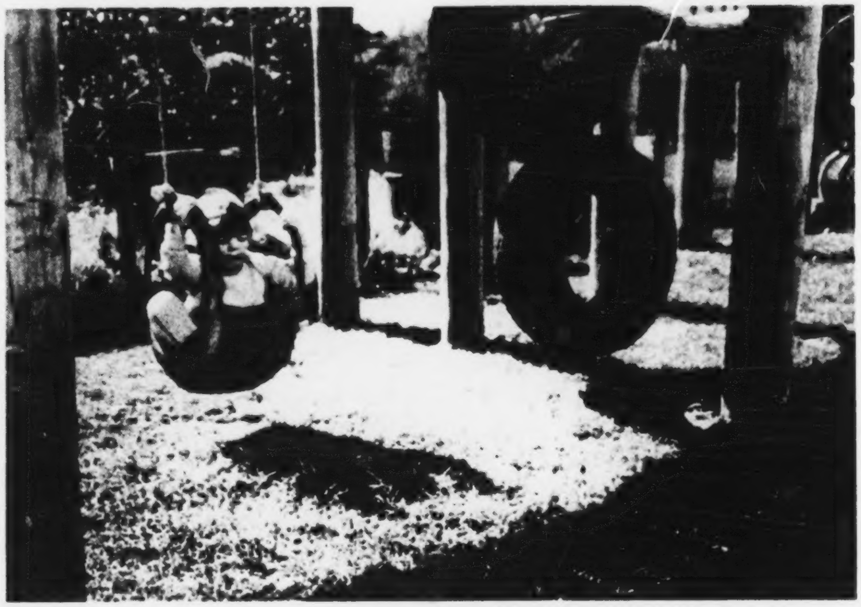
(Worst) - Found seeing all the amazing things at Paeroa Kindergarten that could be part of our programme and are not, very disheartening.

The children/aspects of session

Children absolutely overwhelmed by all the interesting and intriguing activities and equipment.

Role of parents

Observing only.



Using the swing, Puriri

The Role of Parents During the Session

Nine parents, including one father, a regular attender at the Wednesday morning group, were present for all or nearly all of the session, while four parents were present for a shorter period.

Six of the parents were closely involved in working with the children on various activities until morning tea-time and three were involved to a lesser extent. Later in the session one parent spent time helping a small group of children do screenprinting.

The parent on duty, plus one other, began preparing morning tea for children and adults at 9.55am. After morning tea all parents attended the committee meeting, held from 10.10am to 10.40am, which included a talk by a visiting public health nurse on hepatitis B vaccinations, and discussion of such issues as applying for a new building for the group to meet in.

The parents of the three toddlers were responsible for their supervision. At different times throughout the morning parents also observed the way in which teachers worked with children, for example, when children were learning to recognise their written name.

After the parent committee meeting, the father who was present and a mother debated the pros and cons of the hepatitis B vaccinations while others listened and sometimes joined in. There seemed to be a lot of anxiety amongst parents regarding this inoculation, especially for new babies. Later in the session, five other parents continued the discussion about hepatitis B vaccinations outside by the climbing frame.

NGATEA : THURSDAY MORNING, 14 APRIL 1988

When the teachers arrived for Ngatea's second session of the week several of the 28 children who eventually arrived were already outside playing in the sandpit. Their parents had unlocked the building and were nearby.

The Session

Free play activities took up the first part of the morning. The major 'organised' activity (in the sense that it needed considerable input from teachers or other adults) during that time was screenprinting which a number of children chose to do.

Children began washing their hands for morning tea shortly after 10 o'clock. Once the entire group was sitting on the mat the second teacher showed them the new books that had been chosen for the group earlier that morning. This was followed, between 10.10am and 10.22am, by the head teacher reading a story about 'Postman Pat'. The other teacher also listened to the story, sitting with a child on her lap.

Two children celebrated their birthdays today so there was cake for morning tea. (Morning tea-time began immediately after the Postman Pat story.) While children were eating food from the first birthday shout, one of the teachers showed the group a scrapbook that one child had made at home. The second birthday was then celebrated and, during the time the children were waiting for the cake to be cut up and handed around, they listened to a another story. Mat-time ended at 10.40am; the children were restless and noisy by that stage.

Following the extended mat-time, most children went outside, the majority to take part in the music group led by one teacher. At about 10.50am a number of children asked to play 'Top Town', apparently a very popular pastime amongst the children (and not only those at this group). However, it began to rain and everyone had to go inside where, of course, there was insufficient room for a game like Top Town. The entire group stayed inside for the remainder of the session.

COMMENTS FROM TEACHERS' DIARIES

Location/time/date of session : Ngatea, Thursday morning, 21 April 1988

TEACHER 1

Main activities involved in during session

Last minute organising for zoo trip next week. Spent 20-30 minutes calming a boy (4 1/2 years) who threw a beaut. temper tantrum. He'd been building up the first hour - defying everyone, and at a request at mat-time he blew up.

Best/worst things about the session

Worst - the above tantrum. I took T. outside while ... [the other teacher] took a mat-time. His mother was there too - she came outside but I held T. all the time. I decided T. was not going to win this one and stuck with it. When he had calmed he was fine. For the rest of the session he couldn't do enough for ... [the other teacher] or myself.

The children/aspects of session

The zoo trip planning controlled the session. The kids made some neat animals (collage), drew super pictures.

TEACHER 2

Main activities involved in during session

Lots of organising for our zoo trip next Tuesday [including] talking to parents planning zoo trip. [Other than that] large group work mainly.

General comments

No toddlers present.

Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

Tidy-up time began about 11.10am - initially just the head teacher and parents did this while the other teacher and most children continued their music session. By the end of the morning, however, the majority of children had contributed in some way to the tidying-up process.

At 11.17am it was observed that there were 10 parents, both teachers, 28 children, and the researcher all inside together: the result was a very noisy and crowded environment. More parents arrived a little later to collect their children which made things even noisier and more crowded.

Although the session ended at 11.30am both teachers spent several more minutes explaining the altered donation system to two parents. (They spent considerable time discussing this with parents during the session as well.)

Equipment Available

A similar range of equipment to that listed for Ngatea's afternoon session was available. Today, there were also magnetic name cards, and sponges and trays of paint with which to make 'sponge paintings'.

Activities which Children Took Part in During the Session

As well as screenprinting, children listened to stories - both as part of the large group at mat-time and in smaller groups - completed puzzles, painted (at easels, or by dipping sponges into paint and making shapes on paper), and/or drew (on paper or blackboard). Most children spent a brief time on an individual basis with a teacher to ensure that they were able to recognise their own name amongst the pile of magnetised name cards.

Many children also spent time making things from collage materials (these were entirely the children's own creations) and cutting out shapes from paper. One of the teachers taught a child working with collage materials to use scissors for the first time: from feeling initially that she could not manage, the child gained confidence in her ability to use the scissors by the end of the session. Several children took part in the music group, which involved learning about different musical instruments, playing together as a 'band' and singing and doing action songs while being accompanied on guitar by a teacher.

Small groups of children played associatively while in the sandpit (digging roads, tunnels etc), while playing in the crawl tunnel, and while helping one another to put on dressing up clothes. Finally, a small group led by one teacher, danced the 'Hoki Toki'.

Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

In the family corner, Ngatea

The Role of Parents During the Session

Three parents remained throughout the session while six were present for part of the morning. Of those who stayed only some of the time, three worked with their children for several minutes at the beginning of the session before leaving while two, who arrived about 11am, helped tidy up and pack away equipment. The sixth parent, soon to have a baby, mainly just observed.

One of the three parents who stayed throughout the session was the duty parent responsible for preparing the morning tea, while another primarily supervised her toddler and helped with unloading and reloading the van. The third parent also helped with housekeeping tasks (eg she helped prepare the birthday shouts) but spent time working with different children as well.

Interactions between parents and with the teachers

Parents were very social when together and interactions between parents and teachers also seemed to be very friendly and relaxed. All adults present spent considerable time during the morning sharing information or chatting together in a casual way.

At the beginning of the session, a teacher and the parent on duty spent around 20 minutes choosing books to buy for the mobile pre-school unit from a selection sent by Ashton-Scholastic Books. (The parent had requested Ashton-Scholastic to send a supply of books on approval; two boxes of books had been received.)

As occurred at the Tuesday afternoon session at Ngatea, the teachers again explained to those parents present how important it was for children to have healthy morning or afternoon snacks - ie they hoped that the parents would supply fruit rather than biscuits for the children to eat.

TE PURU : THURSDAY AFTERNOON, 14 APRIL1988

Twelve children attended the second Te Puru session for the week, 11 of whom were of enrolled age. Only one toddler was present.

The teachers commented that Thursday afternoons at Te Puru were usually much quieter than the Monday morning sessions because many of the babies and toddlers who attended the morning session stayed at home to have a sleep in the afternoons. (The toddler present this afternoon, however, undertook any activities that she was interested in or capable of; eg she listened to a story and watched the music group. One teacher also spent some time helping her to do a puzzle.)

The Session

The session began at 1pm and, as at the Monday morning session, was entirely free play, with children choosing the activities in which they wanted to take part. No formal large group session was held, although for a short time all but one child chose to join in the music group. Teachers worked with small groups of children or with individual children; the four parents present throughout the session also worked with the children from time to time either on a one-to-one basis or with small groups.

While parents worked with and supervised the children, both teachers spent ten minutes or so during the first half hour of the session doing paperwork relating to the 'new' parent donation system and discussing it both with one another and with parents.

The weather was warm, humid and overcast with frequent rain throughout most of the afternoon. Children played outside when the rain cleared about 2.30pm.

Children began washing their hands for afternoon tea at 2.17pm and, five minutes later, all gathered around a table to have their fruit juice, piece of fruit, and, today, a 'Girl Guide' biscuit. During afternoon tea-time, which lasted until 2.30pm, teachers chatted to both children and parents.

Towards the end of the afternoon tea-break, one teacher began issuing library books to children in an attempt to avoid the usual last minute rush at the end of the session: the opportunity to select a book to take home was very popular with the children and their parents. (Earlier in the session the same teacher had devoted a few minutes to working on a plan for a more efficient issuing system so that it would be less time consuming and so that the frantic rush at the end of the session - compounded by parents coming and going and/or some parents being late to collect their children - could be avoided.)

Tidy-up time began at 2.40pm. Children either helped teachers and parents or continued with various activities until the session ended at 3 o'clock.

There was no one to collect one child at the end of the session so, at 3.12pm, a teacher walked the child home. She knew that if she did not, the child would be left to do so by himself. The teachers finally left Te Puru to drive back to Thames at 3.20pm.

COMMENTS FROM TEACHERS' DIARIES

Location/time/date of session : Te Puru, Thursday afternoon, 21 April 1988

The Te Puru group visited Te Puru primary school during this session.

TEACHER 1

Main activities involved in during session

Getting involved with the new entrant teacher's programme.

Best/worst things about the session

(Best) - It was a lovely afternoon. The kids had a lovely time, they met Miss K. (ie the new entrant teacher at the school).

The children/aspects of session

Our children mixed in with the developmental school programme. They tried everything. Beaut. weather. Had a beach walk as school on beach front.

TEACHER 2

Main activities involved in during session

Observation.

The children/aspects of session

Children very busy investigating.

General comments

School trip to Te Puru primary school. Large group of children [from mobile] well under four [years]. I felt this defeats the purpose of a school visit which was to show the children nearly ready for school where they'll be etc.

Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

Equipment Available

As well as the equipment available earlier in the week there were also magnetised name cards, coloured inks for 'painting', and screenprinting equipment.

Activities which Children Engaged in During the Session

Children variously spent their time painting shells and making things with the collage materials, playing outside in the sandpit (when it was not raining), doing clay work, listening to stories and having 'discussions' with a teacher about a range of topics, taking part in a music group, dipping sponges into paints and making designs on paper, tipping coloured inks onto paper and making designs in it with their hands or with a pencil, plastic knife etc, learning to recognise their written name, choosing a library book to take home and having their choice recorded in the book register, dressing up, playing on the wooden engine, and working with puzzles and with Lego/Duplo.

The screenprinting equipment was not used during most of the session. However, at 2.42pm, just after tidy-up time began, one child asked to make a screenprint. A teacher spent most of the rest of the session helping the child do so. Although the dough was set out, no child worked with it today.

The Parents

Four parents were present for the entire session while one parent was present for a shorter period. The mother on roster duty prepared the afternoon tea, which included home-made shortbread for the adults.

All five parents spent time working with both their own and other children; eg they helped children who were painting or working with collage materials. As well, they undertook general supervision and helped with tidying up and repacking the van. Parents also spent some time talking to the teachers about changes to the donation system and one mother, who was secretary of the parent committee, spent several minutes discussing committee business with the head teacher. Finally, parents chatted with one another and with the teachers while working with the children, during the short afternoon tea-break, and while they tidied up.

Thames Mobile Pre-school Unit

KOPUARAHI : FRIDAY MORNING, 15 APRIL 1988

Thirteen children were present at the second Kopuarahi session for the week, nine of whom were aged three or more years. There were also two toddlers and two babies (the latter remained with their mothers throughout the morning).

The Session

The first 35 minutes or so of the session were primarily taken up with making raisin scones. All enrolled children, plus one of the toddlers, gathered around a table in the kitchen area to mix the scones with assistance from both teachers and one or two parents. The teachers then put the scones (and 'gingerbread men', made from some of the dough) on baking trays, arranging them according to a prepared plan so that each child would be given back his or her own scones once they were cooked.

Making scones, Kopuarahi

The group gathered for morning tea at 10.10am, first washing their hands in a bowl of water provided. The children stayed together for approximately four minutes while they ate their pieces of apple and orange and then returned to various activities. At 10.16am the children gathered together again to eat, with evident enjoyment, the scones they had made. The teachers, with the help of the parent on duty, had buttered the scones for the children. (The adults tactfully avoided having to eat any of the scones themselves.)

From 10.25am to 10.37am one teacher led a music group where the children learned about musical instruments, played as a 'band', and danced and sang while the teacher accompanied them on guitar. The music group gathered behind a tall green cardboard screen, decorated with a smiling crocodile, which the teachers had put up today to form a 'family corner', so that they were less likely to disturb, or be disturbed by, others in the room. Five children were involved in the music session throughout, with some of the other children coming and going as well.

As happened at the Wednesday morning session, more than a dozen children from the school visited the kindergarten group mid-morning and enthusiastically joined in all available activities. The school children apparently found visits to the kindergarten irresistible but the kindergarten children appeared to be a little overwhelmed by the 'invasion' and tended to stand back and just watch while the older children were present. The school children left again at 10.48am, after almost a quarter of an hour.

There was very little outdoor play today because it began to rain mid-morning. Children therefore occupied themselves with the various indoor activities described below; some children also helped parents and teachers tidy up from 11.15am. Most parents and children had left by 11.26am.

During the morning, as well as working with the entire group during the baking activity, each of the teachers worked with individual children (including one of the two toddlers present) and with small groups, unpacked and set out equipment from the van, issued library books, completed administrative tasks relating to parent donation work and the roll, talked to parents, and, finally, tidied up and repacked the van.

At the close of the session the teachers returned to their office in Thames where they spent the afternoon on planning and administration. They also attended a kindergarten teachers' meeting.

Activities which Children Engaged in During the Session

After making and eating their scones, children spent time doing collage work, painting, listening to stories, choosing a library book, and dressing up. (Dressing up clothes were placed behind the cardboard screen which the teachers had erected to form a 'family corner'.)

Seven children - including a toddler - worked on puzzles at some time during the session, either alone or with the help of a teacher. Several children also played a 'climbing snails bingo game' (a 'matching' task) and language games with a teacher and/or took part in the music group.

All children of enrolled age were, as usual this week, invited to take a turn at identifying their own written name from the pile of magnetised name cards. (Any child who wanted to was permitted to take his or her name card away - in order to display it on their fridge at home - so long as it was brought back to the next session. This was to further encourage children to practise recognising their own name and to involve parents in the process.)

One child practised naming colours (of buttons) with a teacher while glueing buttons onto his collage; another child was taught how to use a stapler.

There was no dough play or screenprinting at this session.

The Role of Parents and Interactions between Parents and with the Teachers

Five parents (all mothers) were present throughout the session and two were present for shorter periods.

Three mothers helped the teachers unpack the van and get the session underway, while all of the six parents present at the end of the morning helped tidy up and repack equipment.

As usual, the parent on duty was responsible for preparing the morning tea for children and adults. Two other parents helped children during the baking activity, while one or two others helped children with different tasks for a short time later in the session; eg one parent showed a child how to write his name and another helped a child prepare to do a painting.

Parents, however, spent the majority of their time chatting with one another. This was a very social group: teachers reported that sometimes mothers who no longer had children attending the mobile pre-school unit continued to come along simply because they enjoyed meeting with other parents. Once or twice during the session the teachers had to remind the parents to be a little quieter because it was difficult to read stories and generally interact with the children in a noisy room. (The noise level was especially high today because the weather prevented people from going outside.)

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Both teachers spent time with one parent explaining the correct way to write a child's name; during morning tea, teachers and parents also discussed the importance of bringing fruit rather than biscuits for the children's snack. Towards the end of the session two parents discussed the changed parent donation system with the teachers.

THE LAKELAND MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT, TAUPO

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THE LAKELAND MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT, TAUPO

Background[1]

The Lakeland mobile pre-school unit, based in Taupo, first began operating in 1979. Initially known as the Taupo mobile pre-school unit, the Lakeland unit was renamed in April 1979 to avoid confusion with the Taupo kindergarten. Although two trained kindergarten teachers began work on 30 January 1979 and the mobile unit officially opened for children on 5 February 1979, in the first few weeks of the mobile unit's existence the teachers mainly spent their time carrying out preparatory work with the various communities interested in having visits by the mobile unit, rather than conducting actual sessions with the children. During these weeks, the teachers travelled to prospective venues with Department of Education pre-school advisors (DAPSEs) and/or Maori community officers. (As several of the possible communities to receive visits from the mobile unit were predominantly Maori, it was important for the teachers to be correctly introduced.)

As well as the need to meet people in the different communities it was also necessary for the teachers to plan a programme for their different groups and to establish their equipment and other needs. As there were no other mobile unit teachers in the area to help induct them into the job, it was strictly learn as they went, their only assistance being a small number of resources and a few photographs of what the teachers at the previously established Marlborough mobile pre-school unit were doing. Another problem for the first teachers was that the Ford transit van (one of a fleet of ex school-service vehicles assigned to the mobile unit by the then Department of Education) did not become available for use until May 1979. Neither teacher owned a car so, after a time of travelling with the district officers or community workers, they had to hire a car to transport themselves and materials to venues.

When the van at last became available there continued to be problems, as the vehicle broke down constantly. Eventually, groups who had expressed a desire to receive visits from the mobile pre-school unit began to lose interest due to the unreliability of the van and the resulting cancellation of sessions. By July 1979 the district adviser on pre-school education, concerned about the survival of the unit as a viable service, recommended that another van be provided urgently. Some time later, a replacement was supplied and the mobile pre-school unit was finally able to become fully operable.

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[1] From Department of Education files.

Lakeland Mobile Pre-school Unit

There were originally four groups visited: Mokai, Nukuhau, Iwatahi (each visited twice a week) and Matea Road - "an isolated community with many social problems", 58 kilometres from Taupo - visited once a week.

There have been several changes of venue over the years from those first visited, due to fluctuating numbers of children in different areas and changing community needs. In 1983, one such change was to reduce by one the number of sessions devoted to the Nukuhau group, which in earlier years had received three visits a week. This reduction was at the request of staff from the newly established Te Kohanga Reo who, although they did not want their community to lose the services of the mobile pre-school unit, did not want to jeopardise the development of their own group. The mobile unit therefore began visiting one of its other groups twice rather than just once a week. By 1988, however, the mobile was again visiting the Nukuhau group three times a week: it appeared that the mobile unit and Te Kohanga Reo were able to exist happily side-by-side, complementing each other in meeting the needs of the surrounding community.

The Lakeland mobile pre-school unit was described on file (as at September 1983) as servicing groups "which are to varying degrees remote, depressed socially and economically, and/or part of a minority culture".

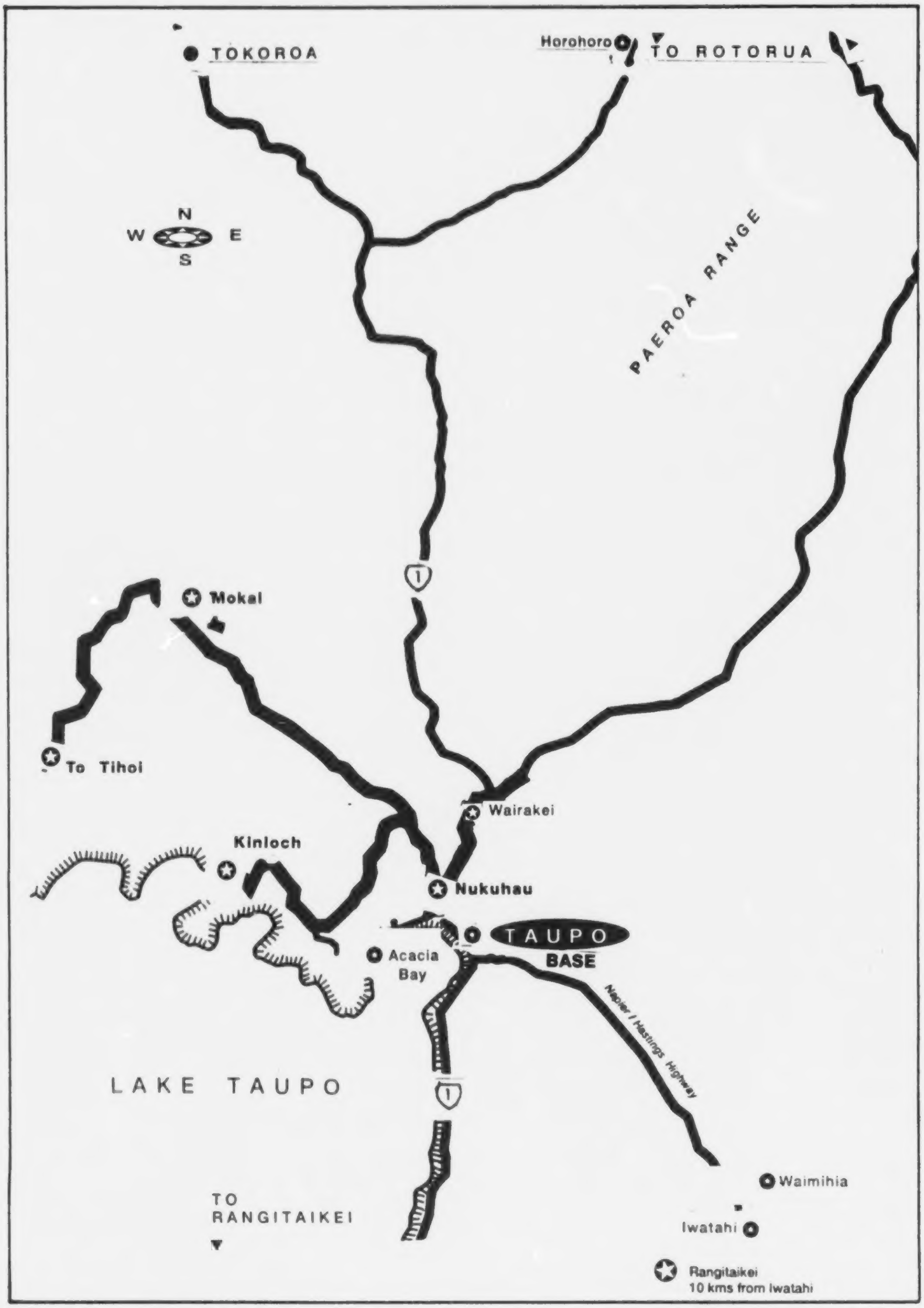
The file went on to state that the groups visited included:

- ". an isolated rural traditional Maori group in depressed financial circumstances and poor housing;
- an urban traditional Maori group in poor financial circumstances (some pakehas included);
- a small village, traditional Maori group; and,
- two groups including a substantial number of families working on large stations or Lands and Survey farms."

As well as taking into account the more general community needs, the file noted that:

> "In planning itineraries and minimum schedule of sessions (for each group) it has been necessary [for the mobile unit] to consider the commitments of families, for example:
> - the need to meet school buses
> - involvement in farm work

Lakeland Mobile Pre-school Unit


TOKOROA
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1
Mokai
To Tihoi
Wairakei
Kinloch
Nukuhau
TAUPO
BASE
Acacia Bay
Napier / Hastings Highway
LAKE TAUPO
1
TO RANGITAIKEI
Waimihia
Iwatahi
Rangitaikei
10 kms from Iwatahi

Scale 2cm = 5 kilometres

> . commitments to the marae and also the fact that many families do not have sufficient reserves of finance and energy to maintain attendance at kindergarten as a priority."

The Lakeland mobile pre-school unit, therefore, both from its inception and subsequently, has been required to serve communities with a wide range of needs. This mobile unit is also notable in that it is the only one which has worked with several predominantly Maori communities. (The file recorded, as at July 1982, that "90% of the children attending the unit are Maori which influences the style of the kindergarten".)

Although the teachers working on the unit at the time of the fieldwork felt that the communities they were currently visiting were no longer as strongly Maori as they had once been, many of the social and other needs continued to be much the same as those which had applied in the early years of the mobile unit's existence. (The section beginning on page 230 below, gives an outline of the characteristics, as the teachers saw them, of the different communities served by the mobile unit in 1988.)

The Lakeland Mobile Pre-School Unit's Itinerary

At the time the fieldwork was carried out (30 May to 3 June 1988) the teachers on the Lakeland mobile pre-school unit were visiting five different groups and travelling a total distance of around 360 kilometres per week (Table 5.1). The groups visited were at Nukuhau, approximately 3 kilometres from the centre of Taupo; Rangitikei[2], 43 kilometres south-east of Taupo along the main Napier/Hastings highway; Kinloch, 28 kilometres west; Mokai, 29 kilometres north-west; and Tihoi which is approximately 29 kilometres beyond Mokai, also north-west of Taupo. The map on the previous page shows the location of the five groups visited.

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[2] In 1983, a hall at Rangitikei was considered by the teachers, the local kindergarten association, and the then Department of Education to be a more convenient meeting place than the original Iwatahi venue for people living at Iwatahi and at Lochinvar Station; it was also considered to be within reasonable travel distance for anyone who wished to attend from the more distant Matea Road area. (The former Matea Road group had been discontinued because falling roll numbers made it an inefficient use of the mobile unit's time to travel 58 kilometres there and back each week for a group with fewer than five children.)

Lakeland Mobile Pre-school Unit

Table 5.1: Distances travelled by the Lakeland mobile pre-school unit teachers and total travel time per day/week

	Morning destination[a]	Distance travelled from base (one way) (kilometres)	Afternoon destination	Distance travelled (one way) (kilometres)	Total kilometres per day	Total travelling per day[b]
Monday	Administration (office)	-	Rangitikei	43 (from Taupo)	86	1hr 10mins
Tuesday	Nukuhau	3	Kinloch	28 (from Taupo)	62	1 hour
Wednesday	Nukuhau	3	Rangitikei	43 (from Taupo)	92	1hr 20mins
Thursday	Mokai	29	Tihoi	29 (from Mokai)	115	1hr 45mins
Friday	Nukuhau	3	Administration (office)	-	6	10 mins
Totals per week					361 kilometres	5hrs 25 mins

[a] The itinerary given in this table is the one the teachers worked to as at July 1988 and not the one in operation during the fieldwork period.

[b] Time taken to travel depended on road, traffic, and weather conditions rather than distance per se.

The Weekly Timetable

The eight child-contact sessions per week were distributed between the five groups as follows. The Nukuhau group received three sessions per week which, at the time of the fieldwork, were scheduled for Monday afternoon and Tuesday and Wednesday mornings. This timetable had been introduced at the beginning of term 2, 1988. Sessions at Nukuhau had, however, previously been scheduled for Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings and the group was due to return to that timetable after the mid-term break. (The local kindergarten association had suggested the new timetable in an attempt to give teachers more time to carry out administration and planning work over the course of a week but, after a trial period, it was decided that the original schedule was more efficient and appropriate.)

The Rangitikei group received two sessions per week, meeting on Wednesday afternoons and Friday mornings (although, as for the Nukuhau group, session times were soon to change back to the original timetable, in this case Monday and Wednesday afternoons).

Lakeland Mobile Pre-school Unit

The remaining three groups - Kinloch, Mokai, and Tihoi - each received one visit per week: Tuesday afternoon, Thursday morning, and Thursday afternoon, respectively.

Most child-contact sessions at the Lakeland mobile pre-school unit were between 2 hours and 2 hours 35 minutes in length. During the observation week, the Nukuhau children received 7 hours and 25 minutes of the mobile unit's time, the Rangitikei children 4 hours and 15 minutes, while children at the three groups which met only once a week received between 2 hours 5 minutes (Tihoi) and 2 hours 40 minutes (Mokai) of pre-school education. Table 5.2 shows the length of each session and the times the sessions began and ended during the fieldwork period. Table 5.3 gives the times taken by teachers (in contrast to the other mobile units, parents at the Lakeland unit were seldom involved) to unpack and repack equipment at the beginning and end of each session. The times given often included such tasks done within the session itself but these did not disturb ongoing activities.

Table 5.2: Length of sessions and times sessions began and ended during the fieldwork period at the Lakeland mobile pre-school unit

Name of group/time	Time session began	Time session ended	Length of session[a]
Nukuhau (Monday pm)	1.00pm	3.15pm	2hrs 15mins
Nukuhau (Tuesday am)	9.00am	11.35am	2hrs 35mins
Kinloch (Tuesday pm)	1.03pm	3.25pm	2hrs 22mins
Nukuhau (Wednesday am)	9.05am	11.40am	2hrs 35mins
Rangitikei (Wednesday pm)	1.10pm	3.05pm	1hr 55mins
Mokai (Thursday am)	9.05am	11.45am	2hrs 40mins
Tihoi (Thursday pm)	1.03pm	3.08pm	2hrs 5mins
Rangitikei (Friday am)	10.00am	12.20pm	2hrs 20mins

[a] Not including time taken to unpack and repack equipment before and after sessions.

Lakeland Mobile Pre-school Unit

Table 5.3: Time (in minutes) taken to unpack and pack up at each session during the fieldwork period

Name of group	Time taken to unpack[a]	Time taken to pack up etc[b]
Nukuhau	15 mins	25 mins
Nukuhau	15 mins	14 mins
Kinloch	12 mins	20 mins
Nukuhau	20-25 mins[c]	15 mins
Rangitikei	10 mins[d]	10 mins
Mokai	20 mins	25 mins
Tihoi	20 mins	20 mins
Rangitikei	12 mins	15 mins

[a] Includes time spent before and after sessions began. Unpacking completed after the beginning of a session did not interrupt the flow of activities.

[b] Includes preliminary packing during session time as well as final packing completed after the session ended.

[c] A relieving teacher was present at this session which probably delayed the setting up process a little.

[d] Two parents helped the teachers to get the session underway.

The Facilities Available to the Lakeland Mobile Pre-School Unit

All five groups visited by the Lakeland mobile pre-school unit met in borrowed, shared accommodation. Facilities available to the different groups were the local marae (Nukuhau), a private house (Kinloch), a community hall (Rangitikei), and two school sites where the mobile unit groups' working space depended on what the schools were doing at the times sessions were scheduled and/or on the weather (Mokai and Tihoi). A detailed description of the facilities used by each group is included in the discussion of the sessions observed during the fieldwork period, beginning on page 230.

In the interview, teachers were asked whether they felt there were any particular problems with the facilities available at the different locations or groups that they visited which had an effect on their work with the children and parents.

Although, by many people's standards, accommodation was by no means ideal, the teachers had few complaints to make. One teacher, for example, commented in response to this question:

> ***"Well, at one place there is a sandpit which is too small - it's at a school and it's not really kept up to standard. Our buildings are fine - we've got to go up and down stairs***

> ***[ie carrying equipment] at a few of them but we manage. There's not much space at Kinloch if it's raining but it's temporary [accommodation] so we look to the future thinking that we're not going to be there that long. Our place at Rangitikei - if it's cold there's no water [ie the pipes freeze] so that makes it a bit of a problem for toilets and washing hands and things like that. And it's a bit cold. We also share it with the mice! But it's not too bad - there are heaters there and you just get going and get on with it don't you?"***

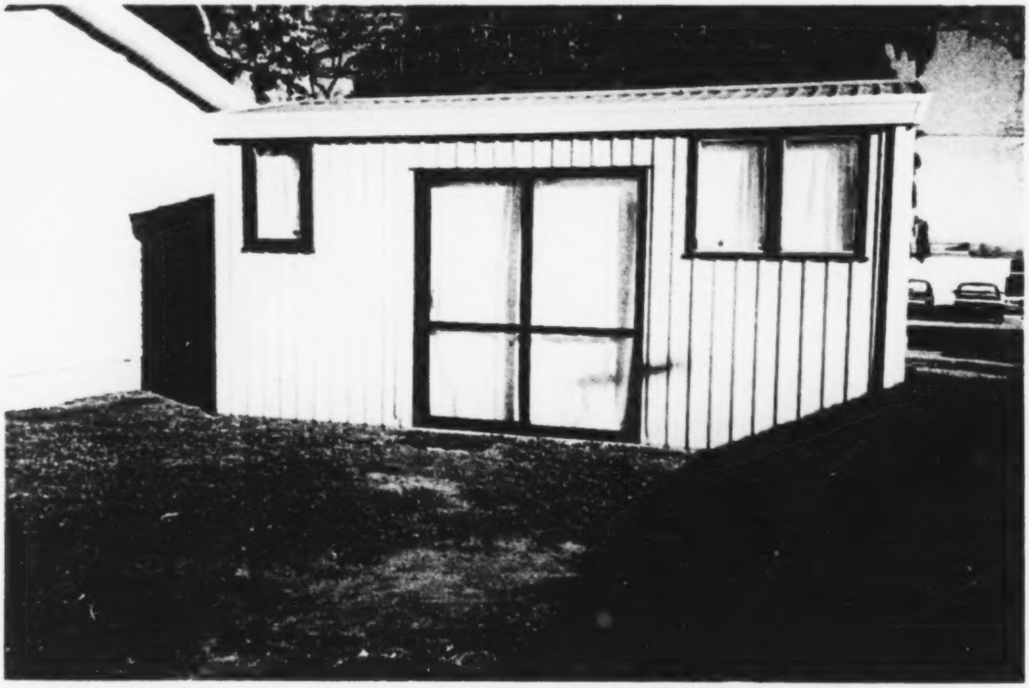
The other teacher commented in similar vein:

> ***"Not really - only at the marae. We're trying to get another building, another location [to meet in] only because when they have tangis [there] we can't go. And we often don't find out until 8 o'clock or half past eight on the morning of one [ie a tangi when the mobile unit session is scheduled]. There is a rugby football clubrooms just round the corner which we've been using in the past [when there is a tangi at the marae] but the Kohanga Reo has started to set up there so we can't really go there anymore - they've [Te Kohanga Reo supervisors] said we can join them there but there's not a lot of room and they've got a lot of little ones and I think it would be a bit of a shambles. Since I've been here it's been mainly over the summer [that tangis have occurred] and we just come over to a kindergarten in town and visit them for the morning. But that's something we brought up at a meeting last term [ie the need for alternative arrangements] - because in wet weather we can't [expect to keep doing that]. [Sometimes] we have taken 15 children over to the town kindergarten and you end up with 50 children in the kindergarten on a wet day. That's expecting a bit much. But otherwise no [ie accommodation doesn't pose any major problems]. You cope with what you get. Mokai is not exactly ideal either but there is nothing else we can do so you have to put up with it sort of thing."***

The teachers did remark on more than one occasion during the fieldwork period, however, that they very much regretted not being able to display children's art work at any of the venues (except perhaps at Rangitikei). They saw this as a major disadvantage of meeting in borrowed accommodation and felt that when children's work is able to be displayed this results in more, and better, work from the children. It also pleases parents to see their children's work exhibited.

Administration : Accommodation and Duties

The Lakeland mobile pre-school unit teachers had an aluminium prefabricated 'garage', situated in the grounds of a centrally located primary school in Taupo, in which to carry out their planning and administrative work. A speech therapist's office was nearby. (The proximity of the speech therapist was advantageous as the teachers sometimes found it necessary to make referrals or to consult with her about certain children.) The office had been fitted with shelves for the storage of pre-school equipment and materials, and contained a sink and Zip unit. Furniture included a desk and chairs; there was a phone available for the teachers' use. The mobile unit's mail was held by the school's office staff until the teachers were able to collect it. At the time of the fieldwork, the office was four years old; previously the mobile unit teachers and staff of Te Kohanga Reo had had to share office accommodation at another school which was unsatisfactory for both groups.



The Lakeland mobile pre-school unit's office

Lakeland Mobile Pre-school Unit

As at June 1988, Monday mornings (8.45am to 12 noon) were devoted to administration and preparation work as were Friday mornings until 9.30am when teachers left to travel to Rangitikei (the session there began at 10am), and Friday afternoons from 12.45pm to 3pm. (Traditionally, teachers on the Lakeland mobile pre-school unit had finished at 1.30pm on Friday afternoons. The Department of Education in Hamilton, however, had recently requested that teachers continue with administrative and other duties until 3pm to bring non child-contact hours into line with those in other mobile pre-school units, and with kindergartens in general. The desire to ensure that teachers had more time for planning and other work without children present prompted the timetable changes referred to earlier.) Shortly after the fieldwork was carried out, the mobile teachers returned to their usual two half days per week for administration, scheduled for Monday mornings and Friday afternoons, and the Friday morning session with children again began at 9am rather than 10am.

When asked in the interview what her administrative responsibilities entailed, the head teacher said:

> ***"Well, enrolling of children, new parents. The money and the rolls and anything that the Department [of Education] needs - statistics, averages, that sort of thing - that comes up twice a year. They want to know numbers who are attending and Maori numbers at each group. The management committee meetings that we have once a month I have to give a report at - the report isn't particularly large because again, we don't have any outlays, so we're not arguing about the cleaner that's not doing her job or the groundsman that's not cutting the grass - it's straight equipment. And they are very generous, the committee, with anything that we need, any new equipment. We ask for it and we show them what we want and there's no problem. They're very cooperative as far as new equipment goes and new books and puzzles and things like that."***

The head teacher did not find that the office work caused any particular problems for her and, apart from the report to the management committee and a few letters which she tended to write at home, all other administrative, planning and preparation work was able to be completed in the time officially allocated to these tasks each week.

The other teacher commented that she was mainly in a support role as far as administrative tasks went but that both teachers took an equal part in planning and discussing the programme for their different groups. She was happy with the existing work order/arrangements.

The Mobile Unit's Vehicle

In common with most of the other mobile pre-school units, the Lakeland unit was using a late model Ford Econovan to transport themselves and their equipment to venues. The van, which had had its rear seats removed and replaced with shelves on which to stack bins of equipment, was housed under cover each night and at weekends at a Wrightcars garage about 2-3 kilometres from the mobile unit's office. The garage staff carried out maintenance and repair work on the van as required.

Petrol was bought at another Taupo garage, where the mobile unit held an account. The teachers kept a record of petrol bought and kilometres travelled which they regularly sent to the Department of Education office in Matamata.

Equipment Used by the Lakeland Mobile Pre-School Unit

The Lakeland mobile pre-school unit was the only one of the nine mobile units which carried almost every item it used at each session in the van - no furniture, or indoor equipment was stored at any of the venues. The only other 'equipment' used during sessions which was not brought to venues by the teachers included sandpits at four of the five locations, plus a wooden climbing structure, two large cable reels, and a swing at Rangitikei. (There were, as well, large wooden cable reels at the Nukuhau marae which were normally stored out of sight behind a wall but rolled out for the children to climb on etc during session times. A major problem with the cable reels at Nukuhau, however, was that these were gradually being chopped up for firewood by people on the marae and the mobile group only had two left out of several that had been available to begin with.)

Equipment carried in the van on a regular basis included several large mats to spread on the floor or on the grass outside; a wooden trolley containing all collage materials; wooden fold-up tables; a play oven; a metal water tank; bins of books, puzzles, Lego, and other small motor equipment; blocks; dough; implements for use in the sandpit; and balls. The teachers even carried a broom for sweeping up at the end of sessions and their own supply of tea, coffee, and milk for morning and afternoon breaks.

Regular contents of the van were supplemented at different times with a variety of other equipment (eg the carpentry table, screenprinting materials, and trollies). The teachers made considerable effort to maintain children's interest at each group by 'saving' equipment (ie not always putting out available supplies at each session) and by regularly changing the range and/or the way in which the activities and equipment were presented. Often, changes were made according to the season, or in response to ongoing themes.

The teachers said that, because they could not leave any of their supplies behind at venues and therefore needed to carry everything they used with them, they would have preferred a larger vehicle. They felt that such a vehicle would have provided more opportunity to carry an even better range of equipment, especially outdoor equipment. They admitted, however, that ability to carry more equipment would lead to different problems, such as more unpacking and repacking before and after sessions.

The teachers also mentioned that much of their equipment was very heavy, especially the wooden trolley on which collage materials were stored. The only set rule the teachers had for the day-to-day running of the mobile unit was that no one - because of the risk of injury - was to attempt to lift the trolley by themselves. (The head teacher commented that in the first year or so of working on the unit she had had to visit a chiropractor regularly on account of back problems which she felt were directly attributable to the heavy lifting required by the job.) The teachers felt that several pieces of their equipment, mainstays of their regular programme, were not suitable in the context in which they were being used, and that equipment needed to be specially designed for mobile pre-school units - so that it was both light and durable enough to withstand the wear and tear of constantly being lifted into and out of the van.

Characteristics of the Communities Served by the Lakeland Mobile Pre-School Unit at the Time the Fieldwork was Carried Out

When asked in the interview to describe the different communities that the mobile unit served the head teacher commented as follows:

> ***"Well the town one [ie Nukuhau] is a cultural mix [Maori and pakeha] at the marae. I really don't know what they [the Nukuhau families] do - I think they work in the bush, some of them. Probably mill, bush workers I would think - at the Tasman [pulp and paper mill]. I really don't know what a lot of them do but I think they work out there. Because nowadays on their [enrolment] form you don't have what the father's occupation is so you tend not to enquire. It used to be on our form. Our Rangitikei and our Mokai [groups] are mostly farming - either farm workers or own their own farm.***

> ***Most of them are farm workers. And Kinloch are farmers too, definitely. Mostly own-your-own out there. And our Tihoi [group] would be mill workers, there's a sawmill there, and again, farm workers. So that would be 90% of occupations of the fathers. I think many are feeling the pinch, though, especially the farmers and the workers on the farms.***
>
> ***The town people don't have to travel very far - they're just scattered around the town here but some from other groups have to travel 20 minutes, so that's 40 minutes a day, some are 15 [minutes drive away], round about that I would say."***

The other teacher also commented:

> ***"Well obviously farming generally [in the four groups outside Taupo]. Yes, basically that's what they are. The Nukuhau group is the only one that's a bit different because it's more based in town so there's fairly - well there's a good cross-section actually there I think, as far as employment and socioeconomic range or whatever."***

Specific Needs and Problems of Different Communities which Could Affect the Way the Teachers Worked with the Groups

Teachers were also asked if they felt that any of the communities had particular needs or problems which affected the way they worked with the children. Both teachers emphasised that they felt it was important to concentrate on the development of social and language skills, especially for children in more isolated areas such as Mokai and Tihoi. The head teacher, for example, stated:

> ***"It's the social needs, you know, plenty of talking to them. They [the children] need to hear the language, it doesn't matter what it is, does it, as long as it's good language."***

This teacher did not feel that the use of English versus Maori was an issue for most of the children attending the unit. She said that although one or two of the Nukuhau children sometimes also attended the local Te Kohanga Reo, most of the (Maori) parents of children attending the mobile unit actively preferred that their children first achieved a good grasp of English before thinking about learning the Maori language. Apart from counting, naming colours, and singing some songs in Maori, the teachers therefore tended "not to emphasise Maoritanga".

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The other teacher commented:

> ***"I keep repeating this - but because all the groups are different you've got to sort of be aware of the different schools [of thought] with every group and I think with a lot of them, like I think especially those Mokai and Tihoi groups, they're basically learning social skills because they're very, very country children out there and they won't often see another child all week which is quite different from the Nukuhau group. So I think it's just really being aware of what they do need and applying it."***

The same teacher further commented:

> ***"I think you could bring a bit of Maori into the Nukuhau group if you wanted to but I don't because I'm not confident at it or know enough about it so I don't try - and they've also got a [Te] Kohanga [Reo] that they can go to if they want to so, no, I think it's just basically that their [the groups'] needs are different and you adjust to that."***

The teachers said that they sometimes referred parents and children to a speech therapist and at other times liaised with district nurses on health matters relating to families enrolled at the mobile unit. On occasion, parents consulted with the teachers about personal concerns, especially matters relating to behavioural problems and the health and development of their children. (There was one such example of this during the observation week; two weeks later the head teacher also commented in the diary she completed for this study: "One parent just wanted to talk about the problems she is having with her child".). Parents at some groups also valued the opportunity to discuss and share problems and concerns with other parents during session times. The teachers had not yet felt a need to consult with a social worker about any of their families.

Particular Events or Characteristics Associated with the Different Venues which Could Disrupt Sessions

When asked if sessions were sometimes disrupted or poorly attended as a result of local community events or seasonal commitments such as shearing, lambing, and so on, the teachers said that this sometimes happened, although at at least two of the five groups, parents tried to ensure that their pre-schoolers were still able to attend.

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The head teacher stated:

> ***"Yes, sometimes. There was something out at Tihoi, now what was that? Oh, the roaring season [laughs] - you know the 'roar'? [ie she means the mating season for deer - a good deer-stalking time]. We didn't have very many [from that group attending] that week. Because the husbands were all out after the deer and the mothers all had to cook at home and prepare all the meals for them when they came in you see, so our roll was down! From time to time what's going on on the farms has some effect on roll numbers too. The schools dictate a lot, like a while ago they had a cross-country inter-school which involved all the schools out that side [eg Tihoi, Mokai] so - we [ie the teachers] went out and stayed the day and watched them run because there was going to be nobody at the kindergarten so we just took the van out and watched them run because they weren't going to come [to kindergarten]. They [the pre-schoolers] were all there [at the races] so we saw them all there. If the school's involved the parents take all their little ones [to events] too."***

The second teacher, apart from mentioning that when tangis or other important events were held at the marae the Nukuhau group had to make alternative arrangements (usually a walk, weather permitting, or a visit to a Taupo kindergarten), commented:

> ***"Yes, I think there probably could be [ie events/commitments which disrupt sessions] but I think the parents try and not disrupt them - like they'll still make an effort to come especially if it's just the once-a-week sessions. And the Rangitikei parents will because they are sort of paranoid about losing us one session a week and so they think [they have to make the effort to come no matter what]. They'd hate to lose it."***

The Children

Although the official enrolling age at the Lakeland mobile pre-school unit was $2^1/_2$ years, younger children were welcome to attend sessions with their parents or caregivers. For this reason, the unit did not have waiting lists as such, although parents were encouraged to put their children's names down as soon as they turned two years old in order to ensure a place for them once they reached official enrolment age.

Table 5.4 shows the number of families and children registered at the Lakeland mobile pre-school unit as at June 1988. It also indicates the number, and age range of younger children who were, according to the teachers, likely to attend on a regular basis.

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Table 5.4: Number of families and children enrolled at the Lakeland mobile pre-school unit as at June, 1988

Name of group	Number of families enrolled	Enrolled children	Age range of enrolled children	Number of non-enrolled children who attended on a regular basis	Age range of non-enrolled children
Nukuhau	13	14	2yrs 9mths to 4yrs 9mths	1	20 mths
Kinloch	9	11	$2^1/_2$ yrs to 4yrs 11mths	1	2 yrs
Rangitikei	9	10	2yrs 8mths to 4yrs 8mths	3	18mths to 2 yrs
Mokai	5	5	2yrs 10mths to 4yrs 7mths	-	-
Tihoi	8	9	2yrs 9mths to 4yrs 9mths	2	18months to to 2yrs 4mths

Table 5.5 records the number of children present at each session observed during the fieldwork period, while Table 5.6 gives the numbers present (as reported by the teachers in their diaries) two weeks later.

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Table 5.5: Number of children present at each session held by the Lakeland mobile pre-school unit during the fieldwork period

Name of group/time	Number of enrolled children[a] present	Number of non-enrolled children present	Total number present
Nukuhau (Monday am)	11	1	12
Nukuhau (Tuesday am)	11	2	13
Kinloch (Tuesday pm)	9	2	11
Nukuhau (Wednesday am)	14	2	16
Rangitikei (Wednesday pm)	8	3	11
Mokai (Thursday am)	6	3	9
Tihoi (Thursday pm)	8	4[b]	12
Rangitikei (Friday am)	6	2	8

[a] Children aged 2 $^1/_2$ up to 5 years.

[b] Two of these children were 5 year olds enrolled at the school. They attended the mobile unit when it visited each week because the school teacher thought they would benefit.

Table 5.6: Number of children present (as reported by teachers) at sessions held by the Lakeland mobile pre-school unit in the week 13 to 17 June, 1988

Name of group/time	Number of enrolled children present	Number of non-enrolled children present	Total number present
Rangitikei (Monday pm)	5	2	7
Nukuhau (Tuesday am)	11	-	11
Kinloch (Tuesday pm)	7	2	9
Nukuhau (Wednesday am)	11	-	11
Rangitikei (Wednesday pm)	6	3	9
Mokai (Thursday am)	3	-	3
Tihoi (Thursday pm)	5	3	8
Nukuhau (Friday am)	10	1	11

The small size of the groups that they worked with meant that the teachers were able to spend most of their time working either one-to-one with children or with small groups. Both teachers very much enjoyed the opportunity to work with children in this way, particularly as one of their major objectives when working with children was to promote the development of quality language. To do this, they spoke to children a great deal and actively encouraged them to respond verbally, especially within the context of a conversation.

The teachers, however, also believed that at times it was important just to sit back and allow children to interact with their peers without any adult involvement. They felt this was very important for the more isolated, country children who often did not see other children of their own age for several days at a time.

Sessions were largely free play, although older children in particular were generally invited to take part in any special activities that had been planned for the day. As far as mat-times were concerned, the head teacher commented:

> ***"Actually, we very rarely have a mat-time. We'll have singing times and story times throughout the session and that's what we consider sufficient for mat-time. Nukuhau is about the only place that we do sit down perhaps at the end of the day. But not every day. Just occasionally - give out notes or sing a few little songs and just get them organised with their paintings and then just send them off but it isn't rigid at all."***

All children brought their own snack for morning or afternoon tea from home. The Nukuhau group seemed to be the only one of the five groups visited which made something of an occasion of the tea-break with all children and adults present gathering to eat and drink together. The other groups tended to be more casual and to continue with other activities while having their snack.

Parents Associated with the Lakeland Mobile Pre-School Unit

The Lakeland mobile pre-school was the only one of the nine units where parents were not formally rostered for duty. Help was welcomed if parents wanted to become involved (although, as they felt they had developed an efficient system, teachers preferred to unload and repack the van and to set out equipment at the beginning of a session themselves); teachers also welcomed any parents who wished to remain throughout sessions, whether to chat, to observe, or to work with the children. It appeared that a roster system had never been a tradition at this unit and the present teachers felt that it would be inappropriate to put pressure on parents to help, partly because many parents had other commitments at work and at home, and partly because, in some cases, it would have been culturally incorrect and/or may have resulted in children being withdrawn from sessions.

During the fieldwork period, however, it was observed that the nature and extent of parent participation varied considerably from group to group: for example, although very few parents remained during sessions at Nukuhau (many mothers were in paid employment to supplement the family income) the two or three parents who did remain, regular attenders, spent considerable time with the children as well as making morning/afternoon coffee for the teachers and helping to stack equipment ready for packing into the van. Tihoi parents also spent considerable time with their children, whereas at the Kinloch and Rangitikei groups parents seemed to regard sessions more as social occasions for themselves, spending most of their time chatting together and with the teachers. The two parents at Mokai mostly just observed and tended to their toddlers. Table 5.7 shows the number of parents present at each session during the observation week while Table 5.8 records the number of parents present in a subsequent week.

Unlike the other mobile units, the Lakeland mobile pre-school unit had just one overall parent committee instead of a separate parent committee for each group. The committee, which also served as the mobile unit's 'management committee', was made up of representatives from each group. The head teacher stated in the interview:

> ***"We don't work as separate groups. This is where we perhaps differ from other mobile units. We have a committee and it involves the five groups so if there's a raffle for firewood then the committee would organise tickets and we'd distribute the tickets out for selling to all the groups so its a combined group. We don't work on individual groups. It just wouldn't function [otherwise] because our numbers out at Tihoi and Mokai are small. And then, in that way the money becomes the unit's money doesn't it, the five groups, so you're not buying something for one particular group that the other groups can't use. Because we take everything with us [in the van] so it's all shared."***

The teachers reported that none of the groups ran additional sessions on the days that the mobile unit did not visit. Parents from the Rangitikei group, however, had been responsible for providing a large wooden climbing platform, swing, and sandpit for their children; the Mokai and Tihoi communities had also ensured that sandpits were available for the pre-schoolers at the local primary schools.

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Table 5.7: Number of parents present at each session during the fieldwork period at the Lakeland mobile pre-school unit

Name of group	Number of parents present all or most of session	Number of parents present for part of session	Total number of parents present[a]
Nukuhau	1	1	2
Nukuhau	2	1	3
Kinloch	4	-	4
Nukuhau	2	1	3
Rangitikei	3	2	5
Mokai	1	1	2
Tihoi	3	1	4
Rangitikei	2	2	4

[a] This group refers not only to parents who had some input into the session during their stay (eg by working with the children and carrying out housekeeping tasks) but to those who may simply have observed or spent their time chatting to other parents and/or the teachers. (It does not refer to those who stayed just long enough to drop off or collect their children.)

Table 5.8: Number of parents present (as reported by teachers) for all or most of sessions held in the week 13 to 17 June, 1988

Name of group/time	Number of parents present
Rangitikei (Monday pm)	2
Nukuhau (Tuesday am)	1
Kinloch (Tuesday pm)	5
Nukuhau (Wednesday am)	1
Rangitikei (Wednesday pm)	3
Mokai (Thursday am)	0
Tihoi (Thursday pm)	2
Nukuhau (Friday am)	2

Other Provisions for Early Childhood Education in and Around the Areas Served by the Lakeland Mobile Pre-School Unit

When asked in the interview whether there were any other early childhood groups or workers in the general area of the mobile pre-school unit groups, the head teacher replied that there was the Te Kohanga Reo (already mentioned above) that ran on Wednesdays, Thursdays, or Fridays in the Nukuhau area, two kindergartens in Taupo, and one or two privately run daycare centres. Neither of the teachers were aware of any REAP (Rural Education and Activities Programme) or itinerant pre-school workers in the district.

The teachers said that although the Nukuhau group was quite close to Taupo and children could theoretically attend the town kindergartens, parents preferred to send their children to the mobile unit instead. They felt that this was primarily because parents liked the fact that their children were able to attend the mobile unit at a much younger age than was possible in town (often, with long waiting lists, children could not begin attending until they were four years old, whereas at the mobile unit they could attend at about $2^1/_2$ years) and also because parents preferred the small group size and the general approach of the mobile unit which they felt better suited their life-style.

The teachers met from time-to-time with staff of Te Kohanga Reo (sometimes combining sessions) but were finding that they were able to do this less often because of the Nukuhau group and the Te Kohanga Reo only having one half day a week in common. The teachers' schedule also allowed very little time to liaise with other early childhood education workers, apart from when they shared lunch-times with teachers at one of the Taupo kindergartens and attended monthly kindergarten teachers' meetings.

The following pages describe, in turn, the venues used by each of the groups visited by the Lakeland mobile pre-school unit and, in order to give an insight into the day-to-day running of the unit, give an account of the sessions observed during the fieldwork period.

Teachers' Comments on what a 'Typical' Week was Like for Them on the Lakeland Mobile Pre-School Unit

Teacher 1:

"Good, basically! Except for this week with my cold! It's pretty relaxed and every day is just so different. Every day, you don't know what you're going to expect or come across or how many children or anything. [The work is] varied, unpredictable!"

Teacher 2:

"I don't think there is a typical week. I think every place, it changes. Children's moods, I suppose, they change everything don't they? But I guess it's a physical week - taking everything out of the van and setting up. Sometimes you are very busy with children, doing things with them and other times it just runs along quite smoothly. I don't really think you can say ours is a typical [kindergarten]. Very much a variety always. You are never bored or think 'Oh gosh, I wish it would hurry up and finish.' It doesn't seem to have those days at all. Unexpected things happen all the time."

A DESCRIPTION OF THE VENUES VISITED AND SESSIONS HELD BY THE LAKELAND MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT DURING THE OBSERVATION WEEK

At the time the fieldwork was carried out (30 May to 3 June 1988) the first administration session of the week for the Lakeland mobile pre-school teachers was scheduled for Monday morning. During the first part of the morning (8.45am to 10.30am) both teachers devoted their time to completing paper work, making phone calls, preparing dough, choosing a different selection of puzzles, books etc from those used the week before, and discussing their work plans for the week. After morning tea, one teacher went to see if she could get a supply of untreated wood off-cuts suitable for the children to use at the woodwork table. While she was away, the other teacher agreed to be interviewed for the study. Both the interview and administration and preparation work were completed shortly after 12 o'clock.

After lunch with teachers at a Taupo kindergarten the mobile unit teachers set off at 12.45pm to drive to their first child-contact session for the week, held at Nukuhau, approximately three kilometres north-west of Taupo (towards Wairakei).

NUKUHAU: MONDAY AFTERNOON, 30 MAY; TUESDAY MORNING, 31 MAY; AND WEDNESDAY MORNING, 1 JUNE 1988

The Facilities Used by the Nukuhau Group

The Nukuhau group met three times a week at the local marae. The marae was situated within large grounds and included a whare nui (meeting house), hall, and large kitchen. The meeting house was kept locked during visits of the mobile pre-school unit. The facilities available to the group, therefore, were the kitchen and, in adverse weather, the hall, which could be entered through the kitchen.

The kitchen was a large, spacious room with a wooden floor. As well as Zip units, cupboards, oven, sinks, and workbench areas there was a large table in the centre of the room stacked high with huge aluminium cooking pots. At the back of the kitchen was a row of gas cooking rings. These were at a level easily reached by pre-schoolers and were a possible hazard should children have turned on the gas. Apart from the smell of mice (which the teachers reported sometimes seeing running about), the kitchen was clean and tidy with room enough to set out several different activities for children to work at.

Outside the hall at the Nukuhau marae

Inside the kitchen of the marae

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There was not a great deal of natural light in the kitchen area, and, on sunny days, it was warmer outside than in.

The hall, immediately adjacent to the kitchen, was a long narrow room and was available for the mobile pre-school unit's use when the weather was bad and children were unable to play outside. However, as it was almost full of stacked up benches, clearing sufficient play space for the children involved a considerable effort on the part of the teachers. (This was not necessary during the fieldwork period because the weather remained fine throughout all sessions.)

The children used the toilet facilities belonging to the marae which were in an outhouse behind the hall. The teachers remarked that hygiene standards were not always high in this area.

The outdoor area, both in front of and behind the marae, was large and a combination of grass and gravel. Children were required to play only in front of the marae so that they stayed in view. Although the grounds were surrounded by a tall wooden fence, the gate remained open. The children were well supervised but, even so, it was observed that one child almost ran onto the road while trying to retrieve a ball. (The child fell over before he could get through the gate.) The road beyond the marae was a quiet one but could nevertheless represent something of a hazard. A further possible hazard was that children were often running around outside when parents were driving in or out of the grounds in their cars.

There was no permanent outdoor equipment available to the children at the marae site except for a very shallow 'sandpit' which had been scooped out of the gravel near the gate (it was not kept covered between sessions and was often visited by local dogs) and two big wooden cable reels kept hidden behind the meeting house between sessions but rolled out in fine weather for the children to climb on or to use as the basis for a hut.

Despite the fact that the meeting house was not available for the mobile pre-school unit's use, the 'verandah' of the meeting house was a favourite spot for the children to play and was usually the place, weather permitting, where the children and teachers gathered to eat their morning or afternoon tea.

Part of the outdoor area at the marae: looking towards the gate and the sandpit (in the corner)

The meeting house where the children liked to gather

Lakeland Mobile Pre-school Unit

The Structure of Sessions Held at Nukuhau During the Fieldwork Period

Although mat-times for the entire group were sometimes held at Nukuhau, this did not happen at any of the three sessions observed during the fieldwork period. All three sessions were therefore almost entirely free play (the exception being when all children came together to eat their morning or afternoon tea) with teachers spending their time with individual children, with small groups, or, to a lesser extent, on general supervision. Because the weather during the entire observation period was beautifully sunny and calm - the aftermath of heavy frosts - the teachers set up almost all equipment and activities outside and the majority of children spent most of their time working and playing in the sun. They were, however, free to come and go between the kitchen and the outdoor area.

Tidy-up time began approximately 20 minutes before the end of each session although most activities continued until the session officially ended.

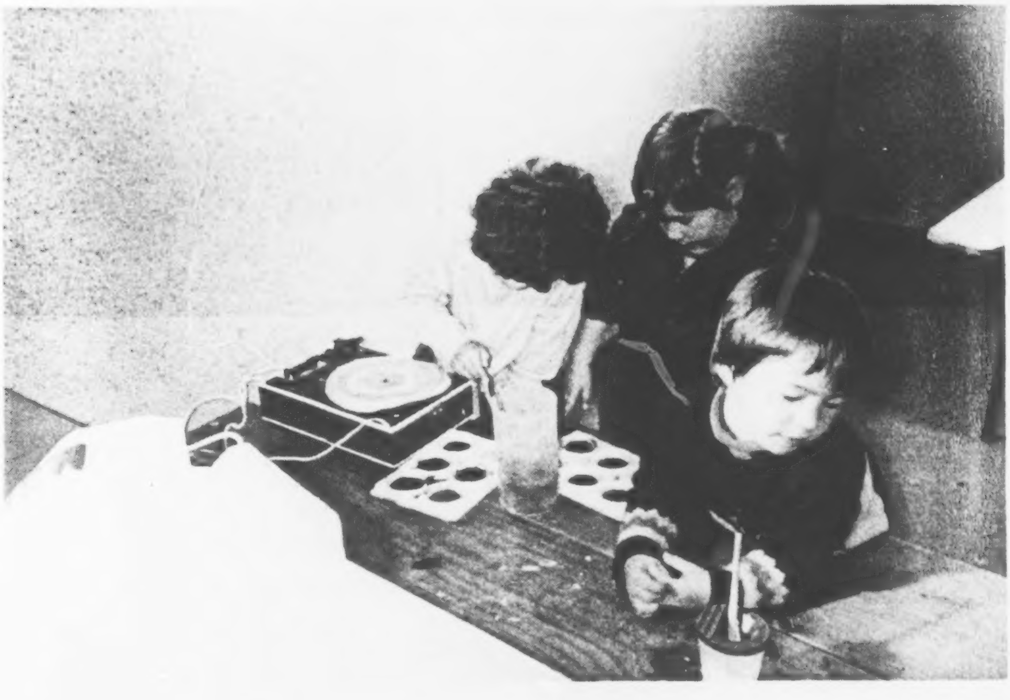
The major features of the three sessions at Nukuhau are described separately below.

THE MONDAY AFTERNOON SESSION AT NUKUHAU

Twelve children were present at this session, 11 of whom were of enrolled age (ie $2^1/_2$ years or older). Seven children were Maori, one Chinese, and four pakeha.

Although most equipment was set-up outside to take advantage of the sunny weather, the teachers put some activities in the kitchen to give the children a choice of places to work. The dough, plus cutters, rolling pins and 'oven' in which to cook dough cakes were set up inside, as was the collage table. There was an extensive range of collage materials, plus pots of glue, scissors, paper, sellotape, and staplers. These were all stored on a wooden trolley which was lifted out of the van at each session. The other equipment available inside included books, puzzles, and a peg-board game spread out on a mat on the floor, magnetised name cards displayed on a metal sheet, and an old turntable on which paper cut into the shape of a record was placed. (The children painted the 'record' while it revolved, with the result that they achieved interesting patterns and shapes.) The Lakeland mobile pre-school unit had several aprons which children were asked - and helped - to put on whenever they were doing any 'messy' play activities.

At the dough table in the kitchen area



Doing "turntable art"

Immediately outside the kitchen the teachers set up painting easels and a rack on which to hang paintings to dry, the carpentry table, water tank (containing warm, coloured water, various bottles and funnels, and a water wheel) and, on mats spread on the grass, wooden blocks, two wooden trucks, plastic farm animals, Lego/Duplo, and musical instruments (together with pois and a tape-recorder).

In order to cater for 'outdoor activities' per se, the teachers rolled the cable reels out from where they were hidden, placing them close together and covering them with blankets and a large piece of sacking. Once mats had been placed on the ground beneath the coverings, the children used this as their hut throughout the session. The teachers then suspended a tyre attached to a length of strong rope from a sturdy tree in order to provide the children with a swing. Metal trucks, spades, buckets, and other implements were placed alongside the sandpit; a soccer ball and other balls of different sizes were also made available for children who wanted them.

As the verandah of the meeting house was very popular with the children as a place to play, the teachers spread mats and cushions there and set out boxes of dressing up clothes, shoes and handbags, dolls (representing both Maori and pakeha), and a teapot and cups for tea-parties. An old adding machine had recently been donated to the mobile pre-school unit and this was also placed on the verandah. Although very heavy for the teachers to carry, the adding machine was proving to be a very well-used addition to the van's contents.

Activities which Children Engaged in During the Session

The children who attended the Nukuhau group's sessions were noticeably more social than children at many other groups associated with the different mobile units visited by the researchers, often spending time working and playing together rather than doing things alone. This was probably because these children were able to attend sessions three times a week and were therefore familiar with most of their peers. Teachers also remarked that the children were not at all shy and took no notice of any 'strangers' who came to observe sessions. The teachers further commented that the Nukuhau children were very productive, doing lots of paintings and other work during session times. This was certainly borne out at this session, with a number of children making crossbows, aeroplanes, and other constructions with wood and nails at the carpentry table and then painting what they had made. Other children produced paintings and collage work, and the turntable art (described above) - some children created two or three differently patterned 'records'. The Nukuhau children also appeared very keen on books; at each of the three sessions observed during the fieldwork period a group of five or more children listened to stories for quite lengthy periods (20 minutes or so), frequently requesting and choosing further books to be read to them.

Children also variously spent their time taking part in a music group in which they, a parent, and a teacher played and sang along with a tape (this lasted only a short time, however, with the four or five children who initially took part wandering off one by one to other activities), using the swing (two children), playing in the hut (and having a tea-party in it), using the adding machine, dressing up and playing with dolls, playing a game of soccer with a parent (four or five children), working in the sandpit (two children) and at the water tank (the toddler especially enjoyed this activity), and using small motor equipment such as Lego, blocks, and plastic farm animals. At different times, children also spent periods with teachers working on recognising their names from the pile of magnetised name cards, learning colours (as part of other activities), and engaging in general discussion of a wide range of topics.

Working outdoors at Nukuhau

During afternoon tea-time, held on the verandah of the meeting house, both teachers - and the parent present at that stage - helped children unscrew caps from their drink bottles and open packages and other containers. They also gave directions and advice about good manners and how to eat properly. As well, this was a time for all children to enter into a group discussion if they wished.

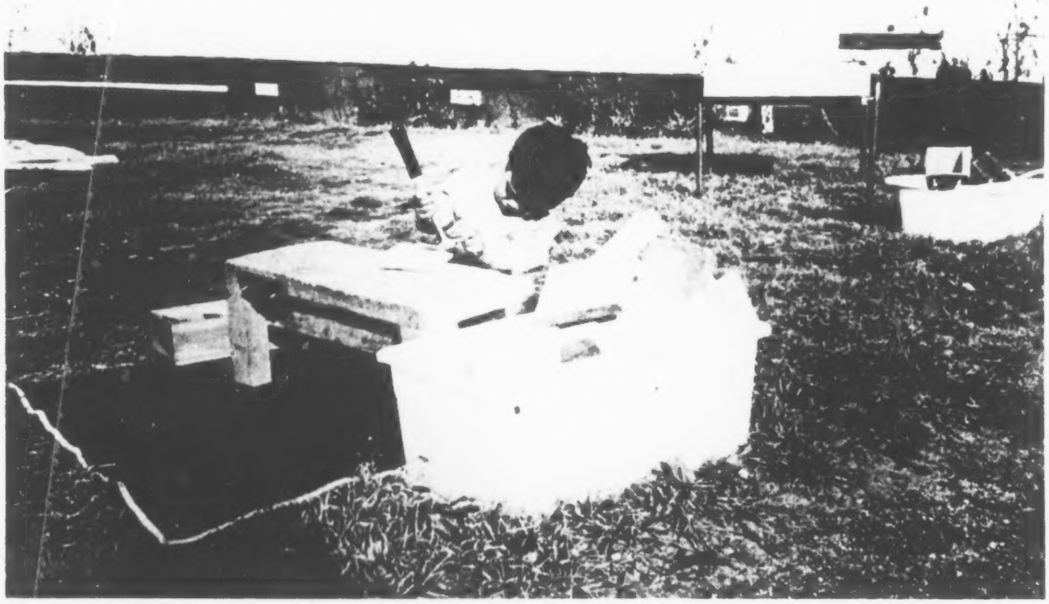
Tidy-up time began at 2.58pm. Shortly before the session ended at 3.15pm the children were called into the kitchen to collect the work that they had completed that day, together with a notice to take home to their parents.

The Role of Parents During the Session

One mother was present throughout the session. She took an active part in what the children were doing by reading stories, joining in the music group, and playing a game of soccer with four or five children. She also prepared a cup of coffee for herself, the teachers, and the researcher and helped during tidy-up time. The rest of the afternoon she supervised her toddler, observed, and chatted to the teachers (although she was rather quiet and shy). One child's father arrived while tidying up was in progress; he worked with his child at the carpentry table until the end of the session, about 15 minutes in all.

Other Comments about the Session

The head teacher was suffering from asthma and was unable to take as full a part in the children's activities as usual.



Carpentry at Nukuhau

Lakeland Mobile Pre-school Unit

THE TUESDAY MORNING SESSION AT NUKUHAU

Thirteen children were present at this session, including a toddler and a baby. Some children who attended the Monday afternoon session were absent today; others were attending the mobile pre-school unit for the first time this week. Six children were Maori and seven were pakeha.

As for the previous session, most equipment was set up outside in the sun. Almost all of the equipment and activities were the same except that screenprinting had been substituted for the carpentry table. (The teachers had been unable to get a sufficient supply of suitable wood on Monday morning - other kindergartens in Taupo, as well as primary schools, had depleted available stocks - so, as Nukuhau children had been able to do carpentry the previous day, the teachers preferred to save what wood they had left for use at some of their other groups.) Fingerpainting was an additional activity which, along with the screenprinting materials, was set up on wooden forms outside.

The children occupied themselves with a range of activities similar to that for the previous afternoon, ie they worked in the sandpit, painted both at the easel and on the turntable, played in the hut and at the water tank, dressed up, used the adding machine, made screenprints, played with the two large wooden trucks and the plastic farm animals, worked with Lego/Duplo and wooden blocks, completed puzzles (outside in the sun rather than in the kitchen as occurred yesterday) with adult help, played soccer with two parents, and looked at books and listened to stories (5-6 children spent almost 20 minutes listening to stories). Two boys spent some time playing 'trains' on the wooden benches outside the kitchen area. Three children and a teacher made a mural by sticking collage materials onto a large sheet of paper pinned to the kitchen wall. The teacher then wrote a story, dictated by the children, on what the collage depicted. There was no music at this session and no children used the swing.

During the morning, the teachers encouraged the children to talk about the paintings and other work they had done, writing down several stories that had been dictated to them by the children. Teachers often engaged children in conversation either on a one-to-one basis or in small groups. They also took every opportunity to emphasise manners (encouraging children to say 'please' and 'thank you'), how to share with one another, and colours. In addition, most children were invited during the session to spend a short time learning to recognise their own name from the pile of magnetised name cards. One child was taught how to use scissors and another was encouraged to do a painting about a story she had just listened to. (She did so.)

At 10.28am all children and adults gathered on the verandah of the meeting house to have morning tea. This was a relaxed and social time, made especially pleasant by the calm, sunny weather.

The children brought their own food and drink for morning tea and the amount that many children brought was extensive. The teachers commented that for a number of children this was probably their first meal of the day. Although many children brought food and drinks that could not be classified as 'healthy eating' the teachers felt that it would not be appropriate for them to try and influence what parents provided for their children. Morning tea time lasted for 20 minutes. As well as eating and drinking, children spent this time talking to one another and to the teachers. Many, especially the youngest children, needed considerable help to open their drinks, pots of yoghurt, and other containers or parcels of food. Children were required to tidy up carefully when they had finished and to put all rubbish in a bag provided.

The Role of Parents During the Session

Two mothers arrived at 9.45am and stayed for the remainder of the session. Both parents involved themselves closely in what the children were doing - for example, they helped children complete puzzles and carry out the screenprinting activity; they also played a game of soccer with several children after morning tea. The teachers remarked that both of these parents, regular attenders at the Nukuhau group's sessions, were particularly good at working with the children. The parents also supervised the toddler and baby who had accompanied them, prepared the morning tea/coffee and helped carry equipment over to the van during tidy-up time. These parents were relaxed and friendly and spent time chatting both with the teachers and to one another.

A third parent (who was present at the Monday afternoon session) arrived at 11.15am and remained for the rest of the morning. She mainly observed today although she did help gather equipment together ready for packing into the van.

Other Comments about the Session

The head teacher was still suffering from asthma. She had tried to get a reliever but none was available (they were either sick, working elsewhere, or were out of town) so came to work despite the fact that she was really not well enough to do so. The sessions at Nukuhau often ended with a story read to the entire group but this was not possible today with one teacher not well enough to either read aloud for several minutes or to do the lifting required to pack the van.

The teachers were concerned about one developmentally slow child who was due to start school in a few months. They made a point of spending as much time with him as they could during sessions, encouraging him to take part in activities, especially with other children, and to talk as much as possible.

THE WEDNESDAY MORNING SESSION AT NUKUHAU

Sixteen children were present at this session, 14 of whom were of enrolled age. Ten children were Maori and six were pakeha.

The head teacher was absent due to illness. A relieving teacher was employed instead; she was well used to the structure and requirements of the mobile pre-school unit having relieved extensively for the unit in 1987. She remarked that she thoroughly enjoyed working on the Lakeland mobile pre-school unit and loved meeting again children and parents whom she had known while relieving previously.

As for the previous two sessions at Nukuhau, most equipment was set up outside in the sun.

Today, the carpentry table was again available, as were almost all other activities (including screenprinting) described for the previous two sessions. The exceptions were the finger painting and turntable-painting activities which were not put out. The two large wooden cable reels were used for climbing on instead of as the basis for a hut and two boys 'helped' the teacher attach the tyre swing to a tree. An additional activity was alphabet soup mix tipped onto a large tray. A group of five children spent several minutes together picking out letters of the alphabet. One teacher interacted with them while they were thus occupied, explaining letters and so on, in between talking to children doing other activities, tying shoelaces, putting paper on easels, and preparing ink for the screenprinting activity - which at least four children attempted with teacher assistance.

A parent had contributed a generous supply of turkey feathers to the collection of collage materials and the majority of older children spent considerable time during the session making 'Indian head-dresses' with the help of one or both teachers. At one point there were eight children working together on their head-dresses. Other children came and went throughout the session to do this activity.

A group of five boys listened to several stories read by a teacher for 20 minutes or more. The stories were at the children's own request. The other teacher led a music group in which she and five children played musical instruments to songs being played on a tape-recorder. This lasted, with some interruptions and children coming and going, for approximately 10 minutes.

Both teachers spent considerable time talking on a one-to-one basis with several children each throughout the morning. The relieving teacher, particularly, concentrated on the developmentally slow child (mentioned in the account of the previous session), successfully encouraging him to engage in conversation with her. The teachers explained colours and shapes to children while working with them on different activities.

A small group of children plus a teacher played 'shops', first building themselves a counter with very large wooden construction blocks. (These were carried in the van but had not previously been used this week.) Another small group of children, with a teacher involved some of the time, engaged in an imaginary game about fire engines.

The children and adults had their morning tea together on the meeting house verandah from 10.26am until 10.50am. Packing up began at 11.27am. One teacher encouraged children to help tidy up by making a game of collecting up the balls which were scattered about. The session ended at 11.40am.

The Role of Parents During the Session

The two mothers who remained for most of the Tuesday morning session were again present. They spent most of the morning chatting to one another and to the teachers and caring for their baby and toddler. They also prepared the morning tea for the adults, worked with children doing puzzles, talked to children occupied with painting and other activities, and undertook general supervision. At one point, both teachers were inside working with children doing puzzles and collage work while the parents were outside keeping an eye on any children out there. A third mother came at 11.20am (the same parent who was present at the Monday afternoon session and again on Tuesday) with her toddler and helped tidy up.

KINLOCH : TUESDAY AFTERNOON, 31 MAY 1988

The third child-contact session for the week was held at Kinloch, 24 kilometres (or approximately 20 minutes drive) west of Taupo.

The head teacher was not well enough to attend this session and was forced to go home even though she had been unsuccessful in getting a reliever. The other teacher felt that she would be able to cope perfectly well alone as the group was small and several parents always stayed throughout the session. (She also enlisted the researcher's help during the first part of the session - both to unpack the van and to work with children on different activities.) However, because of the head teacher's absence this session cannot be regarded as 'typical'.

At the time the fieldwork was carried out the Kinloch group was meeting in a private home belonging to one child's parents. The previous year, the group had met in someone else's home but was expecting that the new local community hall, still under construction, would become their permanent venue in a few months time.

A total of 11 children attended the Kinloch group's session, nine of whom were aged $2^1/_2$ years or older. (Overall, children attending this group were very young, with all but one being under four years.) A toddler attended with his mother and older sibling; the baby present belonged to the family whose house was being used by the group. All children were pakeha.

The Facilities Used by the Kinloch Group

The house in which the group met was a small farmhouse located at the top of a hill. Although the weather during the session was sunny and only moderately breezy, the teacher remarked that this was usually an extremely windy spot, often making outside play not only unpleasant but difficult as well (eg when paper on easels was torn in the wind while children were trying to paint). Today, however, most activities were placed outside to take advantage of the mild weather. The house was enclosed within a well fenced yard and, although the gate remained open, a cattlestop at the gate would have made it difficult for children to go beyond the garden area even in the unlikely event (in view of the ratio of adults to children present) of there being inadequate supervision. The entirely rural outlook from the garden was very attractive.

Inside the house, apart from the bathroom facilities, the rooms made available for the mobile group's use were the kitchen-dining area, which the owner cleared as much as she could to make room for the mobile unit's resources to be set up, and the living room which was mainly for parents to sit in when the weather meant that they could not stay outside. The living room opened immediately off the kitchen. As the house was only small, space was at a premium at the best of times but when children plus mothers all had to be inside at once space was very confined. The teacher said that things became very crowded and noisy at such times, especially as there were often more children and parents present at sessions than there were today, severely restricting the activities which could be undertaken.

The largest folding table belonging to the Lakeland mobile pre-school unit was set up in the kitchen with the trolley of collage materials and a rack containing paper alongside; the children

The Kinloch venue

Part of the outdoor area : looking towards the cattlestop were then easily able to help themselves to what they wanted. The turntable painting activity and screenprinting materials were also set up in the kitchen.

Outside, on the concrete area below a short flight of steps leading to the kitchen-dining room, a painting easel and the rack on which paintings were hung to dry were set up. The dough table and toy oven were also placed in this area. The rest of the equipment used during this session was placed on mats spread out on the grass. This included: Lego and Duplo; plastic farm animals, trucks, and cars; wooden blocks; the two wooden trucks; a wooden train set (not used at Nukuhau this week); the adding machine; books and puzzles (including one brand-new puzzle); the tank, normally used for water play but on this occasion filled with dried soup mix; telephones; dressing up clothes; and a posting box for the very youngest children.

Not surprisingly, as the venue for this group was a private house, there was no permanent outdoor equipment, such as a sandpit or climbing structures, available for large motor activity. The mobile unit's swing could not be used either as there was no suitable tree from which to suspend it. The teacher did, however, construct a hut for the children to play in by draping a large piece of sacking over a picnic table. There were also balls from the van for the children to kick or throw.

The Session

The session, which was underway shortly after 1pm, despite there being only one teacher present, was entirely free play with no large group work. The children came together briefly at 2.15pm to have the afternoon tea they had brought from home. They did not seem very interested in eating or drinking and most very quickly returned to what they had been doing. (None of the adults had afternoon tea at this session.) The teacher circulated amongst the children, spending her time with individuals and small groups or sometimes just observing. She also chatted to parents from time to time.

The teacher commented that although sessions at Kinloch were officially from 1pm to 3.30pm, two and a half hours was sometimes too long for the under-four-year-olds who attended. At this particular session, most children left at 3.25pm but sometimes sessions ended sooner; the teachers and parents liked to be flexible so that if the feeling of the group on a given day was that the children had had enough, then they packed up a little early. The teacher completed the loading of the van after children and parents had gone, finally leaving the venue shortly after 3.30pm.

Lakeland Mobile Pre-school Unit

The Activities which Children Engaged in During the Session

Four children (plus the researcher!) spent at least half an hour at the water tank which today contained dry alphabet soup mix, lentils, and pasta, together with a sifter and a number of small containers. The children appeared to thoroughly enjoy this activity (talking and smiling frequently), sifting through the lentils with their fingers and picking out numbers and letters of the alphabet with which to fill their containers.

Several children at different times completed paintings, collage work (with the help of the teacher and a parent), and screenprinting, while others worked with the dough, Lego/Duplo, puzzles etc. The toddler played with the posting box brought on the van and also tried a few other activities.

The session underway in the kitchen at the Kinloch venue : screenprinting and collage work

Two children spent several minutes kicking a ball around the garden while three or four children spent some time 'talking to their parents' on the telephones. Two others sat or stood one on either side of the hut and conversed over the 'phone'.

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Lakeland Mobile Pre-school Unit

Three children spent an extended period on dramatic play. They set up the hut as a fish and chip shop, incorporating the adding machine into their 'set'. One boy dressed up in a fluffy orange hat and high-heeled shoes (he was quite a sight!) which he seemed to feel equipped him for his role as a vendor in the fish and chip shop. (The teacher was very pleased to see this child dressing up as he was generally actively discouraged from such 'sissy' behaviour by his mother.)

While children were getting their bags for afternoon tea one child discovered a green grub: this became a discussion topic for five or so minutes (two other children came and joined in) during which time the teacher explained aspects of the grub's life-cycle and the necessity to take care not to crush it.

The teacher read two stories to a group of five to seven children which, with breaks for discussion and one or two interruptions from children doing other activities, lasted around 14 minutes. While the teacher was reading to this group, one of the parents helped another child construct rails for the train engine to run along.

The collage trolley used at Kinloch and at all other venues during the fieldwork period

Several children also chose a library book to take home. (The mobile van carried a bin of fairly old books, different from the stock of books used during sessions, which had accumulated over

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the years. These were available to children, from the Kinloch and Rangitikei groups only, to borrow on a weekly basis. The teachers did not have a formal procedure for recording who had borrowed these books but found that they were returned without any problems by participants at these particular groups; they had not found this at some of the other groups, however, which was why they restricted the 'library service' to just two groups.) The teacher commented that although the books were not very 'exciting', the children still seemed to like being able to borrow books which were different from those they had at home.

The Role of Parents During the Session

Some of the parents in the Kinloch area operated a car-pool system so that they did not always have to bring their children to mobile unit sessions themselves; this occurred today. Other parents stayed just long enough to drop off their children and have a brief chat to the teacher and other parents before leaving. They returned in time to collect their children again at the end of the afternoon.

Five parents, including the owner of the house where the group was meeting, remained throughout the session. One parent worked intensively for a large part of the session with children doing collage work but, overall, parents spent most of the session sitting on rugs outside on the grass chatting to one another. (It was particularly pleasant in the sun towards the end of the session because the wind dropped almost entirely.) The parents also supervised in a very general way, tended to the baby and the toddler, and interacted with the older children from time to time (primarily in response to initiations from the children), but the afternoon seemed mainly to be an occasion for these parents to get together and talk. One parent had brought smocking to do while she chatted.

RANGITIKEI : WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON, 1 JUNE AND FRIDAY MORNING, 3 JUNE 1988

The third of the five groups visited by the Lakeland mobile pre-school unit each week was at Rangitikei, 43 kilometres south-east of Taupo, along the main road to Napier. Rangitikei was the most distant of the five venues visited. The group was allocated two sessions per week which took placed on Wednesday afternoons and Friday mornings at the time the fieldwork was carried out.

Lakeland Mobile Pre-school Unit

The Facilities Used by the Rangitikei Group

The Rangitikei group met in a local community hall, set in a large flat paddock, a considerable distance from the road, accessed by an unsealed track through stands of tall pine trees.

The hall was an old, wooden building poorly maintained and inadequately cleaned. Birds were easily able to gain access to the hall through the roof and the rafters were well coated with bird droppings. The hall also smelt strongly of rats or mice. (The teachers commented, however, that there was a possibility that a school in the vicinity - the Whangaparoa Forest School - was to be moved onto the same site as the community hall. If this happened the school would also use the hall and would therefore take on the responsibility of keeping it clean. This would be a positive step for the Rangitikei group.)

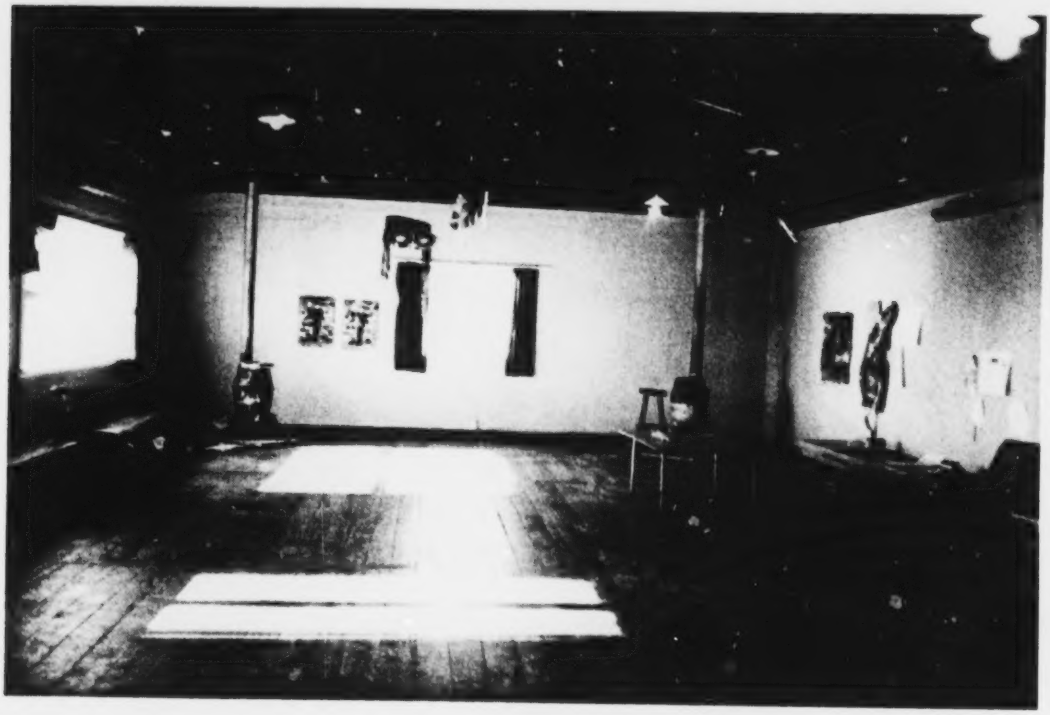
The Rangitikei venue

Another view of the Rangitikei hall

The main room of the hall was painted blue with brown ceiling and rafters. It had blue curtains and a wooden floor. The room was empty but for two pot-belly stoves, a few chairs (some broken), and a number of old wooden benches around the perimeter of the room. A few examples of children's art work (not current) were pinned up here and there.

Toilet facilities were available down a short flight of steps from the main room. (Often, water froze in the pipes at Rangitikei during the winter and this meant that there was no water in the kitchen or for the toilets, creating quite a problem for the group.)

The kitchen was immediately off the main room and, adjacent to this, was a small carpeted room with cream coloured walls, a wooden bench unit, blackboard, and a number of posters on the walls. Previous teachers on the Lakeland mobile pre-school unit had almost always used only this room for sessions. However, although this room was the best kept and sunniest part of the entire building, its size meant that it would have significantly reduced the number and extent of activities which could take place, even with a relatively small group of children. For this reason, the current teachers preferred to use this area just for mat-times, reading stories to small groups of children, and for special activities. When at all possible, the teachers set out all of the mobile unit's resources outside on the grass and/or in the covered porch area to the hall. They generally only used the main hall when the weather did not allow for outdoor play - which was often the case at Rangitikei - but the children still needed space to move about freely.



Interior of the Rangitikei hall

The small room used by the Rangitikei group for stories etc

Equipment set up on, or around, the verandah of the Rangitikei hall

Lakeland Mobile Pre-school Unit

Outside, the grass in front of and at either end of the hall had been cut short. Beyond the tended area, the grass was tall and tussocky, while behind the hall, there was also a patch of low scrubby bush (where the children liked to 'hunt for bears'). There was no fencing around the hall but as it was so far off the road the children were in no danger. A possible hazard, although almost certainly very slight, was that children were able to run about in the area where parents arrived and departed in their cars; also, children were able to get out of sight and reach of adults rather too easily: for example, when in the sandpit, in the scrub behind the building, and even on the climbing frame which was some distance from where most activities were set out.

Members of the local community had fund-raised to build a large wooden climbing structure (mentioned above) for the mobile pre-school unit children. One of the teachers commented that, although she thought it was excellent that the children had somewhere to climb, she disliked the structure's very steep and high ladder which she felt was unsuitable for the age of the children.

A view of the climbing structure, Rangitikei

A sandpit was located around the corner at one end of the hall and, to the left of the climbing structure, a tyre swing had been attached to a stout wooden frame (again provided by the community). There were also two large wooden cable reels which could be used to climb and/or sit on or as the basis for a hut or 'house'.

The teachers were able to drive the van right up to the porch leading to the hall which facilitated the unloading of the van and getting the session underway. The relieving teacher, however, emphasised the point that unloading the van in wet and windy conditions was a very different proposition from doing so in the calm, sunny weather that occurred throughout the fieldwork period.

The two sessions observed at Rangitikei are described separately as follows.

THE WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION AT RANGITIKEI

The session began at 1.03pm and ended at 3.05pm. Session time officially ended at 3.15pm but parents at this group often liked to leave a little early because of older children coming home from school, and other commitments. One parent and child were already at the venue when the teachers arrived; they, plus another parent who arrived soon after, helped to unpack the van. A total of 11 children attended, including two toddlers and a baby. All but one child were pakeha. The session began for children the moment they arrived: that is, they immediately began working with whatever was available.

The head teacher was again absent due to illness; the reliever mentioned previously (see the Wednesday morning session at Nukuhau) fulfilled her duties.

Because this group had elected not to have a tea break on Wednesday afternoons, the session today was entirely free play, incorporating no large group time at all. (The teachers had actively discouraged the former very large afternoon teas at Rangitikei because all other activities tended to stop for half-an-hour or so while people ate.)

The activities and equipment were set out in the shelter of the porch or on mats on the grass outside the hall to take advantage of the sun, which made it warmer to be outside than in. The available activities and equipment included the sandpit, swing, climbing structure, cable reels, dough table and oven, books, puzzles, board games, Lego/Duplo, balls, collage materials, paper, brushes, paints and easel, large wooden blocks, a wooden train set, the water tank filled with dried soup mix, and dressing up clothes and dolls. The 'library box' was also available for the children to select books from.

Lakeland Mobile Pre-school Unit

The Activities which Children Engaged in During the Session

At this session, most children spent their time using collage materials (in particular, with the help of a teacher, almost all of the older children made Indian head-dresses out of turkey feathers; one boy also asked to "make a turkey" and proceeded to do so!); playing in the sandpit; working with dough; playing and hiding in the hut which was made by draping sacking over the two wooden cable reels; doing puzzles; and working with the Lego, wooden blocks, and the train set. No children chose to use the swing at this session; nor did any child use the dressing up clothes or play with the dolls. Only one child - a toddler - chose to do a painting. (The two toddlers present were free to join in any activity under the supervision of their parents. They were especially attracted to the soup mix in the water tank.)

When they were not making Indian head-dresses with one teacher, several children, sometimes on a one-to-one basis and sometimes with one or two others, spent considerable time with the other teacher, sitting on the porch playing a peg-board game or completing puzzles. Plenty of conversation went on when children were working with the teachers.

At 2.23pm, five children and both teachers went inside to the small room used for mat-times and special activities. One teacher read 'The Lion in the Meadow'. This generated much discussion, particularly by two boys, and both teachers were involved in listening and responding to the children's comments. The two boys also had a lengthy, largely two-way, conversation about the 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe', a programme they had seen on TV. One teacher, plus a child, went outside again at 2.41pm while the other teacher, responding to the remaining four children's requests, continued reading for at least a further 10 minutes.

Three or four boys spent a large part of the afternoon together playing on the climbing structure, playing chase, and throwing and kicking balls around.

The Wednesday afternoon session at Rangitikei

In the sandpit at Rangitikei

Lakeland Mobile Pre-school Unit

The Role of Parents During the Session

Three parents stayed throughout the session while two were present for between 45 minutes and one hour.

As well as tending the two toddlers and baby present, three of the five parents either helped to unpack the van and/or to tidy up at the end of the session, while two of the women spent a brief time interacting with children at the dough table. Most of the parents' time, however, was spent interacting socially with one another and also with the teachers. (During one period - 18 minutes in all - such interaction was combined with supervising a few children who chose to stay outside while both teachers were inside with the remaining children who were listening to, and discussing, stories.) The parents appeared to be very friendly and relaxed with one another and with the teachers.

THE FRIDAY MORNING SESSION AT RANGITIKEI

At the time the fieldwork was carried out, the Friday morning session at Rangitikei was scheduled to begin at 10am. This was to allow the teachers some time to carry out administration work in their office before leaving for the venue. The later starting time was probably also desirable for the time of year because heavy frosts made the roads very slippery.

The teachers (both of the usual teachers were at work again after their respective illnesses[3], although one commented that she was still feeling less than well) left their office at 9.30am, arriving at Rangitikei at 10am. No parents or children were present when the teachers arrived; the first child came at 10.05am, the second at 10.10am and the rest soon after. There were eventually six children of enrolled age present, including one child who did not arrive until 11.52am, plus one toddler and a baby.

There had been a hoar frost, and ground which was in shade was still white and frozen when the van arrived at the Rangitikei hall. However, sun had reached the area immediately in front of the hall and thawed it reasonably well. Although the air was very chilly, the weather was typically sunny and calm as can be expected after a frost. The teachers were therefore able to put mats down on the grass and set up equipment as had been done at the Wednesday afternoon session.

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[3] Although the head teacher had been able to return to work in time to attend the Mokai and Tihoi sessions (described on page 261 following) held the previous day (Thursday), the other teacher, this time, was absent due to illness.

Lakeland Mobile Pre-school Unit

Structure of the Session and the Activities which were Available

The time taken to unpack the van and set out equipment was approximately 12 minutes; the children began using materials and interacting with one another as soon as they arrived.

There was no formal mat-time; some children had the snack that they had brought from home around 11.45am but this was not an organised time and the children ate and drank while carrying on with what they were already doing. The atmosphere of the session was relaxed and leisurely for children and adults alike.

Some parents and children left at 12.10pm while the remainder left at 12.20pm. The session was officially scheduled to end at 12.30pm but parents chose to leave earlier because of commitments at home (eg preparing lunch for their husbands and others working on their farms).

The activities and equipment which were available at this session were basically the same as those for the previous session at Rangitikei except that the tape-recorder and musical instruments were also available today as were an activity involving threading pieces of plastic tubing onto string, the adding machine, and a task in which children could hammer shapes onto a large piece of corkboard.

The Friday morning session at Rangitikei

Lakeland Mobile Pre-school Unit

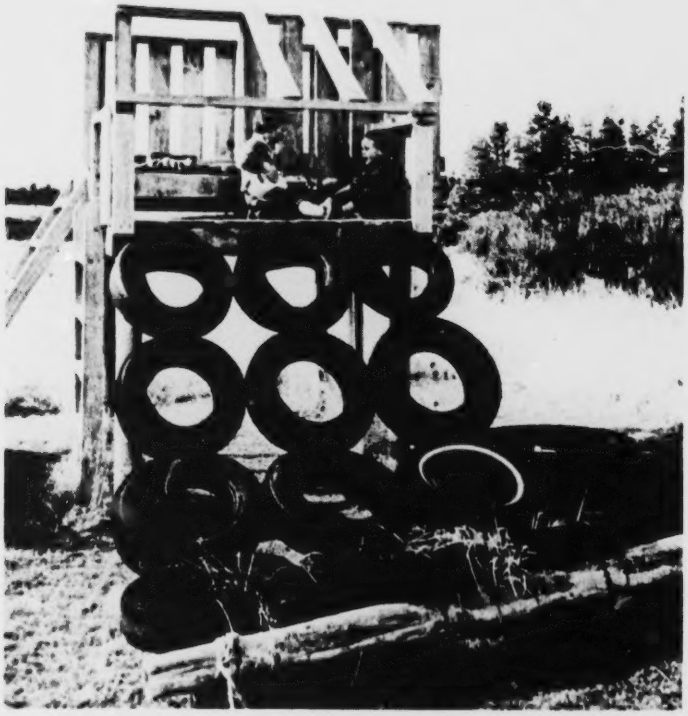
The soup mix activity, Rangitikei (Friday am)

The Activities which Children Engaged in During the Session and Interaction between Children and Teachers

One child arrived with his father, crying very loudly. The head teacher spent several minutes calming him and encouraging him to take part in an activity. She was successful and the child spent the rest of the session apparently very happily interacting with other children and working on various activities. The teachers said that this child often arrived in some distress, presumably because he was afraid of being left behind at the group, but soon calmed down. (Neither of his parents was able to remain during sessions.)

As well as general supervision and caregiving activities (of both children and the environment) the teachers were able to spend time during the morning on a one-to-one basis with all children present, including the baby. For example, one teacher helped a $2^1/_2$ year old child thread pieces of plastic tubing onto thread, taught a child how to use scissors, cuddled the baby, helped a boy organise the train set, pushed a girl and then a boy on the swing, encouraged a child to complete a painting, wrote a story for another, and had a conversation for three minutes or more with at least one child. The other teacher worked one-to-one with a child who was learning how to nail shapes onto a piece of cardboard, explained names of colours to one boy, read a story to a girl who requested her to do so, assisted a child on the climbing frame, and took an interest in what a child at the dough table was doing.

Teachers also worked with small groups of children: one of the teachers worked alongside three children at the dough table and later spent time with three boys in the sandpit who were working cooperatively to dig a hole large enough to "catch a bear". (The teacher reported that, the previous week, she had spent an hour in the scrub behind the hall with the same three boys 'hunting for bears' so this was an ongoing activity for these particular children.) The other teacher led a music group for about 10 minutes with four children: they sang along to songs played on the tape-recorder and accompanied themselves on tambourine, triangles, and maraccas. (Later, two of the boys who had participated in the music group climbed onto the platform of the climbing frame by themselves, one taking a ukelele with him. They then proceeded to do a voice-strings duet, in between giggles and chatter.)



Voice-strings duet on the climbing structure at Rangitikei

The teachers remarked that the children did not always need or want teacher - or other adult - involvement in what they were doing. In the teachers' view, this was because the children saw others of their own age so seldom that they were often just happy to play together (eg at this session, various children used the climbing frame together or chased each other about). Also, because the equipment and activities provided by the mobile pre-school unit maintained a high level of novelty and interest for these children, especially as many were very young pre-schoolers, they needed little or no encouragement to become involved in whatever was available. For these reasons, the teachers felt it was sometimes important just to stand back and let the children get on with what they were doing in their own way. During these times, the teachers carried out general supervision and interacted with parents.

The Role of Parents During the Session

Two parents were present throughout the session and three were present for part of the morning.

One parent spent a brief time (3-4 minutes) at the dough table with her child but, in the main, parents sat in the sun obviously enjoying the opportunity, while tending to the baby and knitting, to chat to one another and to the teachers. The only further interaction with children was to respond to something their child said in passing.

All five parents, to some extent, helped the teachers prepare equipment for reloading into the van.

MOKAI : THURSDAY MORNING, 2 JUNE 1988

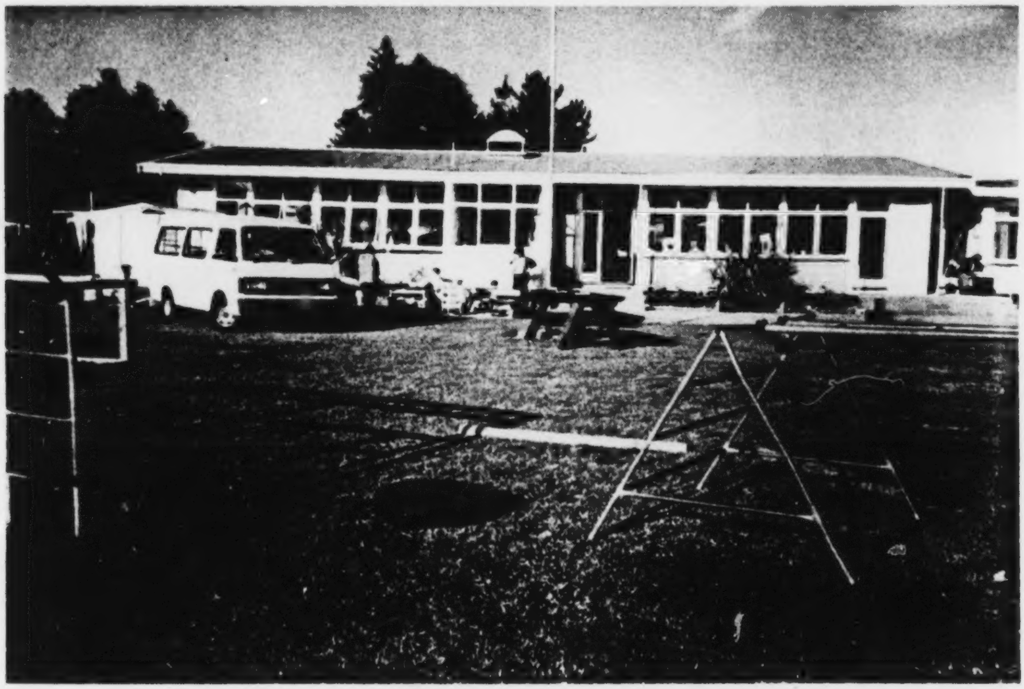
On Thursday mornings, the Lakeland mobile pre-school unit was scheduled to visit Mokai, one of its two most isolated groups. The group met at the Mokai school, 20 kilometres north-west of Taupo (an approximately 30 minutes drive). The head teacher and the reliever who had worked the previous day (the second teacher this time was absent on account of sickness) left Taupo at approximately 8.35am and arrived at the venue shortly after 9am. The session, not counting setting up time, was underway by 9.10am.

Nine children attended the Mokai session, three of whom were under 2½ years. Three children were Maori.

Lakeland Mobile Pre-school Unit

The Facilities Used by the Mokai Group

The Mokai school was a two-teacher (plus part-time secretary/teacher aide) juniors to form 2 school. The school building consisted of two classrooms, an office, kitchen, and staff room. Its two classrooms were not arranged in the 'conventional' way with rows or groups of desks; instead, the environment was much more informal to allow for greater freedom of movement and included sofas and bean bags. The philosophy of the school teachers was to focus on the strengths of the (mainly Maori) students attending the school rather than to impose a more rigid structure of what, and when, they should be learning. The classrooms were liberally decorated with excellent samples of the students' art and craft work.



Mokai school

Participants in the mobile pre-school unit's group were not assigned a specific area of the school in which to set out equipment and centre activities; rather they tended to work around whatever the school happened to be doing that day, finding a space where they could. Often, this was in a kind of hallway which separated the two classrooms. Although not knowing where they would be working required considerable flexibility on the part of the mobile pre-school unit teachers, they reported that it was not a major concern for them. The researcher was not able to observe how easy it was for the mobile group to work inside in a relatively small space with older (school) children coming and going, because all equipment was set up outside at this session, again to take advantage of the continuing fine weather, and there was no inside play at all.

Lakeland Mobile Pre-school Unit

The session underway at Mokai

The rural outlook at Mokai

Lakeland Mobile Pre-school Unit

The school was set in very spacious grounds which incorporated a rugby field and included tennis courts and a swimming pool, the latter safely surrounded by a tall, wooden wall and a locked gate. There was a variety of outdoor climbing equipment really only suitable for school-aged children, although there was also a sandpit especially for the mobile pre-school unit children.

The teachers remarked that it was a pleasure to work at the school this year. The previous year that had not been the case because of 11 very hostile and aggressive older school students who had made conditions very unpleasant for the mobile pre-school unit teachers.

The Session

The equipment available at the session included dough plus oven, rolling pins, and cutters, Lego, plastic farm animals, puzzles and board games, the water tank containing dried soup mix, painting easel, paper, and paints, magnets, provisions for collage work (eg pieces of fabric, cardboard boxes, sellotape, scissors and glue), the adding machine, wooden trucks and large wooden blocks, the carpentry table, books, balls, and spades, buckets, and metal tip trucks for using in the sandpit.

The size of the group was small and the session was notable for the amount of one-to-one interaction that occurred between children and teachers. The teachers were able to have extended conversations - some up to five minutes long - with different children; they also spent considerable time reading to individual children or to small groups of two, three or four. Topics of conversation included discussion of what the children had been doing since the last session, the properties of magnets, and the fact that grubs had been eating the flax bushes in the school grounds.

One child seemed sullen and reluctant to join in any activities other than retreating to the sandpit by himself. However, both teachers actively encouraged him, talking to him at every opportunity, and he gradually responded by talking a little himself and by doing some collage and carpentry work.

The teachers facilitated dramatic play. For example, one teacher was observed playing 'petrol stations' with two children: in the petrol station made out of large wooden blocks, they exchanged imaginary money for goods, filled (Lego) cars with 'petrol', and organised a tow truck to collect a crashed car.

Lakeland Mobile Pre-school Unit

In the first half of the morning, several children completed paintings and worked with the extensive range of collage materials available. At least four children, with the teachers' help, made 'Humpty Dumpties'. Also, towards the end of the session, both teachers helped three children make 'Indian head-dresses', using the turkey feathers contributed by a parent earlier in the week. When they had completed their headgear, the teachers took the children inside so that they could admire their appearance in front of a mirror.

Wearing 'Indian head-dresses' while listening to a story

At 10.25am, the children washed their hands for morning tea which they had outside on the mat. However, the children ate and drank what they had brought very quickly; they seemed very eager to return to the activities available and most had done so by 10.32am. The teachers, parents, and researcher also had their coffee (made by the head teacher in the staff room) during this short break.

At around 10.35am, the school children had morning interval. Three of the younger pupils asked if they could paint, use the dough etc, which they were permitted to do. Later, from 10.50am to 11.10am, the school children were again outside, this time playing ball games, and some of the pre-schoolers joined in for several minutes. (The older children were solicitous of, and helpful towards, the younger ones.) One very little three-year-old girl also took the opportunity to start climbing the high wooden fence surrounding the swimming pool and had to be retrieved by the head teacher. The teachers remarked that these country children, used to plenty of space, were capable of covering a lot of distance in a very short time.

Both teachers spent brief periods chatting with the school teachers and the school secretary during the morning and also with the two parents present.

After a relaxed but busy and productive morning, made especially enjoyable by the calm, sunny weather, tidy-up time was begun at 11.35am. The teachers pinned a notice for parents (regarding donations) to each child before saying goodbye to them at 11.45am. At 12 o'clock, when they had finished packing the van, the teachers left the Mokai school to drive to Tihoi for the afternoon session.

The Role of Parents During the Session

Two parents were present at this session, one of whom remained for the entire morning. The other had to leave after morning tea because her toddler was tired. The two parents primarily chatted to one another while supervising their toddlers (although one of the three toddlers present took part in many of the activities that the older children, and the teachers, were involved in). The parents chatted to the teachers from time to time as well. Later in the morning, the one remaining parent spent about half-an-hour in the office talking to the school secretary. As well, she spent five minutes or so with two or three children who were working with Lego. Neither parent carried out any housekeeping tasks.

Two or three other parents called in briefly to collect their own, and other people's, children at the end of the session.

TIHOI : THURSDAY AFTERNOON, 2 JUNE 1988

The second of the two most isolated groups visited by the Lakeland mobile pre-school unit was at Tihoi, 57 kilometres north-west of Taupo and 29 kilometres, or approximately 30 minutes drive, from the morning's venue at Mokai school.

Tihoi is a small, predominantly Maori community of farmers and mill-workers. Cut-backs at the mill in recent times, however, had meant that a number of families had had to move away from the area.

A focal point of the community was the local primary school which had been run by a husband and wife teaching team for the past 12 years. A teacher-aide was also employed. The school

- the meeting place for the mobile unit's Tihoi group - was attractively maintained and set in large, well-fenced grounds against a back-drop of bush and trees.

Tihoi school

The school teachers stressed to the researcher how fortunate their community was to have the mobile unit visit and that it was an extremely valuable service. From time to time, the school teachers took an active role in encouraging any local parents who were omitting to send their pre-schoolers to the mobile unit to do so; they also reminded other parents that it was important not to turn up late to sessions, as sometimes happened, because this drastically reduced their children's access to pre-school education.

After the mobile unit teachers had had their lunch and some discussion with the school teachers in the staff room, they began unpacking the van. The session was underway by 1.03pm, although some equipment had still to be unloaded. The teachers remarked that at Tihoi "we don't hurry" - their response to the relaxed and leisurely tone set by this group.

The teachers again took advantage of the lovely afternoon by setting up all equipment outside on mats around the sandpit, located at one end of the school. (In unfavourable weather the group was allocated a space to work inside the school.) The school had its own outdoor equipment, including swings attached to a tree, metal climbing frames, and a climbing structure created out of tractor and other tyres, which the pre-schoolers were free to use, but the large, well-constructed sandpit had been built especially for the mobile pre-school unit and was very popular with the children as a place to work.

The session took place near the group's sandpit at one end of the Tihoi school

The Session

Twelve children, six of whom were Maori, attended the session. Two of the children were in their first year at the primary school but both the school teachers and the mobile unit teachers felt that it was beneficial for these children to continue to join in with the mobile unit group, at its once-weekly meeting, until the end of the year. One of the other children present was a toddler and another, a baby in a pram. The teachers discovered that several of the regular attenders were absent today due to sickness.

All the equipment and activities that had been used in the morning session at Mokai were again available at this session. The only addition was a container of dressing up clothes, dolls, and a tea-set. The head teacher remarked that these items were seldom attractive to children at any but the Nukuhau group, but today she was interested to see two children dressing up and playing with dolls.

Lakeland Mobile Pre-school Unit

Major activity at the session took place in the sandpit, with several children at any given time working either associatively or alongside others with spades and buckets to build roads and tunnels for the metals trucks and tractors. Teachers (and parents) also joined in with the children there from time to time but were more likely to spend their time talking to the children (including offering suggestions, advice, and directions) rather than physically taking part in what they were doing. Apart from the sandpit, other 'outdoor play' that children took part in involved climbing on the tyres and metal climbing structures belonging to the school.

As at Tihoi, the teachers talked extensively to individual children and to small groups on a variety of topics and in a variety of situations, and read stories (although to a lesser extent than happened at Tihoi because the children were happy to do other things instead). They also helped children, as required, to complete 'Humpty Dumpties' and other creative endeavours. One child asked if he could make a collage picture "for his dad" and was duly helped to do so. Later, one teacher helped a child to use scissors for the first time and then, at another child's request - and dictation - wrote a story based on the child's painting. The children were not concerned at there being a relieving teacher; they appeared to relate very happily to her, the only clue that they did not know her well was that two children called her "the kindy lady" in lieu of her name.

Besides the teachers, there were four other adults present during the session which freed the teachers from a lot of their supervisory and other duties and enabled them to spend more time talking with the different parents. (One further parent came at 2.40pm - she did not come earlier because her children had been ill - apparently just to talk to the teachers. She spent around 15 minutes talking to the head teacher about health and other problems relating to her children. Another parent spent much of her time at the session talking socially to one teacher or the other. A teacher also took time to take this particular parent's baby for a walk in its pram.)

Part-way through the afternoon, with the session running smoothly, the head teacher was able to go into the school and give the paint containers and brushes from the van a thorough washing, something that she did not often get time to do.

The Tihoi group had elected not to have an afternoon tea break, preferring to wait until they returned home. The teachers began clearing up some of the equipment at about 2.55pm while the children continued with other activities until the session officially ended shortly after 3pm. At this venue, finishing time was strongly influenced by the arrival of the school bus. Several children were, however, still running around together in the school grounds at 3.10pm while waiting for their parents to finish chatting. All equipment was packed away in the van by 3.15pm. The teachers then left to return to Taupo, arriving at the garage where the van was stored soon after 4pm.

The session underway at Tihoi

The Role of Parents During the Session

Three parents, plus one child's aunt, remained for all or almost all of the session. Another child's father was also present for the first 25 minutes - during that time he and his son worked with puzzles.

Although none of the adults present helped the teachers with any housekeeping tasks, three in particular did spend a lot of time interacting with their own children, eg in the sandpit, at the dough table, doing collage, building with Lego and blocks, and completing puzzles. The parents chatted casually amongst themselves and also to the teachers; as well, it was noted that they spent time watching how the teachers worked with the children. As already mentioned, one mother arrived 25 minutes before the end of the session, apparently just to talk to the head teacher about health and other matters relating to her children.

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THE HUNTERVILLE MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT, HUNTERVILLE

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THE HUNTERVILLE MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT, HUNTERVILLE

Introduction

The Hunterville mobile pre-school unit, the most rural of the nine units, is based in Hunterville, a small community in the Rangitikei County of Northern Manawatu, 38 kilometres north-east of Bulls, and 48 kilometres south-west of Taihape, on National State Highway 1 (the main trunk line from Wellington)[1]. The population of Hunterville was 503 at the 1986 census.

The Hunterville mobile pre-school unit was one of five units, to be modelled on the mobile unit already operating in Marlborough, authorised in the 1978 Budget. The pre-school, designed to serve the rural Hunterville area, opened for children on 30 January 1979, and was recognised as a free kindergarten under the jurisdiction of the Rangitikei Free Kindergarten Association and the Department of Education.

Background[2]

In 1978, prior to the proposal for a mobile pre-school unit in Hunterville being put forward, the South Rangitikei Free Kindergarten Association canvassed playgroups in the general district around Hunterville to assess potential interest in visits from a mobile pre-school unit. The association stated in a submission to the Department of Education and the New Zealand Kindergarten Union that the results of their survey:

> **"... show the enthusiasm of the area as well as the need of the children. (Only figures from groups who gave their approval have been included; we know there are many more who will join once they see the unit in operation. In total, 102 children over $2^1/_2$ years would be on the roll with 64 children under $2^1/_2$ years.)"**

The Association concluded that:

> **"If our purpose is to provide pre-school for as many children as possible, then a mobile unit in the Hunterville area seems an excellent way of progressing toward that end."**

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[1] From Wises New Zealand Guide: A Gazetteer of New Zealand, 8th edition, Wises Publication Ltd, Auckland, New Zealand, 1987.

[2] From Department of Education files.

Hunterville Mobile Pre-School Unit

Around the time that the proposal for a mobile unit was put forward, the Hunterville playcentre was considering closing down - only 16 of the 40 pre-schoolers in the town of Hunterville were attending the playcentre - due to the recent loss of its supervisor and no other parents being willing or able to commence supervisor's training. The file states:

> **"When the unit was established around Hunterville, the playcentre at the time was at a very low ebb and asked for support from the mobile unit till such time as the centre was strong enough to stand on its own feet."**

For this reason, the newly established Hunterville mobile pre-school unit agreed to allocate one of its weekly child-contact sessions to supporting the playcentre. It did this by assisting at one of the two sessions run each week by the playcentre. This continued until the end of term II, 1983 when the decision was made - jointly by the Department of Education, the Central Districts Playcentre Association, the local kindergarten association, the mobile unit's management committee, the mobile unit teachers, and the senior teacher - that the playcentre was now strong enough to operate alone. The mobile pre-school unit, therefore, ran its own separate session in Hunterville which, as explained in footnote 4 on page 276, was to enable children from nearby communities visited by the unit to attend two sessions per week instead of only one.

The file shows that there have been a large number of changes in itinerary over the years of the mobile unit's operation - mainly as a result of people moving into and out of various districts, thereby causing fluctuations in the numbers of pre-school children available to attend sessions. The mobile unit began in 1979 by visiting eight groups per week (with a total of 79 children $2^1/_2$ to five years), including the support visit to the Hunterville playcentre mentioned above. (Only one of the groups visited in 1979 - Papanui - continued to be in existence when the fieldwork was carried out in 1988.)

Those responsible for establishing and developing the Hunterville mobile unit have (in common with people associated with other units) had to be very sensitive to the needs and rights of already established playcentres - and any other pre-school facilities - in nearby communities and to take care not to encroach on their territory. The departmental file stated that:

> **"Consultation with the Playcentre Association is necessary each time the itinerary of the mobile unit is changed to accommodate a new group. This consultation is necessary to ensure that the revised itinerary does not encroach on an area already served by an existing playcentre and so threaten the existence of that centre."**

Evidence from the file suggests that this aspect of establishing the mobile unit's itinerary had been satisfactorily and amicably resolved over the years. However, as the Hunterville unit has customarily visited eight groups per week, other aspects of deciding upon a workable itinerary have not always been as straightforward. The departmental file again states, in connection with difficulties over the course of the unit's history, that:

> **"The organisation of servicing eight different groups is complex - because accommodation may only be available for certain days and groups may only be able to come together on that particular morning or afternoon."**

Available information suggests that the history of the unit has not always been smooth in other ways as well. At the end of 1980 both teachers resigned (the file does not record why) and on 26 January 1981 - the date that the mobile unit was due to commence the new pre-school year - no replacement teachers had yet been appointed, nor had the recently purchased van been fitted with suitable shelves for the efficient storage and transportation of equipment. In addition, the unit's belongings were reported to be "scattered over a few farms at present and the storage shed [cum teachers' office] will not be completed until early March". The then District Officer - Early Childhood Education therefore requested that the Department of Education allow the mobile unit to begin the term two weeks later than usual, and preferably with an extra week without children as well, in order to enable new staff to familiarise themselves with the groups and the route they had to travel. The District Officer requested in the concluding paragraph of her submission: "Could this be treated as the opening of a new kindergarten please, seeing everything is in disarray?"

Despite some continuing problems (for example, the District Officer - Early Childhood Education in 1982 advised the Department of Education that: "The numbers attending are a worrying trend and the seven no-contact sessions per fortnight[3] cannot be ignored."), matters eventually settled and by 1983 it was noted on file that:

> **"The mobile unit is proving a valuable part of the rural Hunterville education system."**

By 1988, when the fieldwork was carried out, the Hunterville mobile pre-school unit gave every evidence of having a well-established, smooth running system in place.

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[3] In lieu of these child-contact sessions, however, the teachers at the time did special home and school visiting, thus operating much like community pre-school workers.

The Itinerary of the Hunterville Mobile Pre-School Unit

At the time the fieldwork was carried out (March 1988) the Hunterville mobile pre-school teachers were visiting eight[4] different venues in the course of their week's programme. As shown in Table 6.1, the total distance that they travelled each week was 387 kilometres, with distances to individual sessions ranging from 0.5 kilometres to 68 kilometres. The map opposite shows the location of the groups visited by the mobile unit.

As had applied from the outset, the itinerary of the Hunterville mobile pre-school unit was based on whether there were children under five years of age in a particular area who would otherwise have little or no access to some form of pre-school education. (Five children was usually deemed sufficient to warrant establishing a group.)

Length of Sessions

Sessions provided by the Hunterville mobile pre-school unit were an average of two hours in length (not counting time spent before and after sessions on packing and unpacking, setting up, talking to parents, and so on); the exception, as shown in Table 6.2, was for sessions held at the venue in Hunterville which were of three hours duration. Table 6.3 records the time that it took to unpack and repack equipment at each session observed during the fieldwork period.

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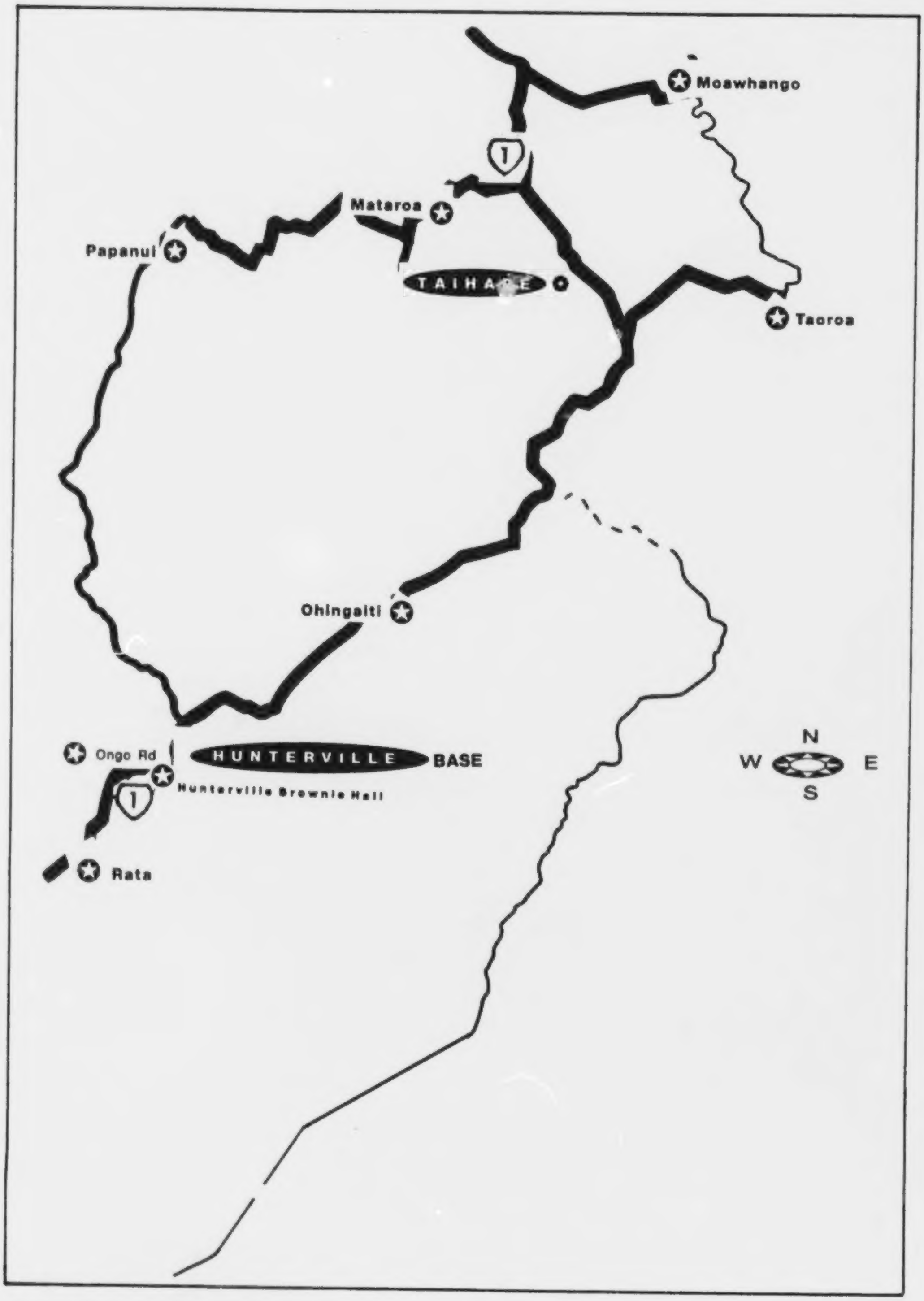
[4] At the Hunterville venue, however, combined sessions were held on a Friday morning for the Ongo Road and Rata groups (these were small communities between 6.5 and 8 kilometres from Hunterville); this meant that children at each of these groups therefore received two sessions a week, instead of the one received by the five more distant groups located at Taoroa, Ohingaiti, Papanui, Mataroa and Maowhango. (Parents from the more distant communities served by the mobile unit were also welcome to bring their children to this session; some parents took advantage of this opportunity by making Friday their day for going to town. Their children could therefore attend the additional pre-school session and they could complete shopping and other business.)

Hunterville Mobile Pre-School Unit



Moawhango
1
Mataroa
Papanui
TAIHAPE
Taoroa
Ohingaiti
N
W
E
S
Ongo Rd
HUNTERVILLE
BASE
Hunterville Brownie Hall
1
Rata

Scale 2cm = 5 kilometres

Table 6.1: Approximate distances travelled per week and the time spent travelling by the Hunterville mobile pre-school unit teachers

	Base to morning destination			Morning destination to afternoon destination			Afternoon destination to base		Total kilometres per day	Total travelling time per day (minutes)
	Morning destination	Distance travelled (kilometres)	Travelling time (minutes)	Afternoon destination	Distance travelled (kilometres)	Travelling time (minutes)	Distance travelled (kilometres)	Travelling time (minutes)		
Monday	Ongo Road	6.5	6	Rata	14.5	17	8	11	29	34
Tuesday	Taoroa	55.0	50	Ohingaiti	41.0	35	19	12	115	97
Wednesday	Base (Admin & Planning)	-	-	Papanui	42.5	50	42.5	50	85	100
Thursday	Mataroa	60.0	46	Moawhango	29.0	25	68.0	55	157	126
Friday	Hunterville	0.5	2	Base (Admin & Planning)	0.5	2	-	-	1	4
								Weekly totals	387 kilometres	361 minutes (6hrs 1min)

Table 6.2: Length of sessions and times sessions began and ended during the fieldwork period at the Hunterville mobile pre-school unit

Name/time of group	Time session began[a]	Time session ended	Length of session[b]
Monday			
Ongo Road (am)	9.00am	11.00am	2 hours
Rata (pm)	1.10pm	3.05pm	1hr 55mins
Tuesday			
Taoroa (am)	9.30am	11.45am	2hrs 15mins
Ohingaiti (pm)	1.10pm	3.05pm	1hr 55mins
Wednesday			
Papanui (pm)	1.10pm	2.55pm	1hr 45mins
Thursday			
Mataroa (am)	9.25am	11.32am	2hrs 7mins
Moawhango (pm)	1.08pm	3.00pm	1hr 52mins
Friday			
Hunterville (am)	9.00am	12 noon	3 hours

[a] This refers to the time the session was sufficiently underway to allow children to participate in a range of activities. Any further unpacking or setting up, completed after the times given, did not interrupt the session.

[b] Includes time taken to tidy up and pack some equipment before the session ended.

Table 6.3: Time (in minutes) taken to unpack and pack up equipment at each session held during the fieldwork period at the Hunterville mobile pre-school unit

Name of group	Time taken to unpack and set up equipment[a]	Time taken to pack equipment and tidy up[b]
Ongo Road	18	25
Rata	14	30
Taoroa	20	20
Ohingaiti	10	15
Papanui	15	20
Mataroa	20	25
Moawhango	16	25
Hunterville	30[c]	45[c]

[a] Includes time spent both before and after sessions began, although most was completed before the starting times given in Table 6.2.

[b] Generally, between 5 and 10 minutes was spent on final cleaning and packing the van after the session. Most of the packing and tidying up process therefore occurred during session times but as the bulk of this was

completed by parents and one teacher - while the other teacher took a final mat-time - this did not affect sessions to any great extent.

c Unpacking/packing up took longest at this venue. However, because teachers had less than a kilometre to travel to this venue they were able to do almost all the unpacking and setting up before the session began; also, the parent on duty took major responsibility for the packing up process - starting well before the end of the session - leaving the teachers free to continue working with the children.

Characteristics of the Communities Served by the Hunterville Mobile Pre-School Unit

The Hunterville mobile pre-school unit served predominantly farming communities. The largely pakeha families (the main exceptions to this were the Mataroa and Maowhango groups, where several families were Maori) which attended the unit were reported to be either land owners, or farm workers employed on other people's properties. The teachers stated that the "farm owners tend not to mix socially with the farm workers". (This division was noticeable in the patterns of interaction observed amongst some groups of parents at sessions held during the fieldwork period.)

At most of the eight groups/communities visited by the Hunterville mobile pre-school unit there were few mothers in paid employment outside the home or farm. The teachers stated that:

> ***"There are a few working mothers [ie those in paid employment outside their home or farm], but they get, well not exactly a hard time from the others, but the mothers who aren't working don't really understand working mothers. There are some mothers from our Thursday [Mataroa and Moawhango] groups who [have to] work but the groups earlier in the week where there are mostly farm owners, you know if there is a working mother amongst that group the others don't understand why she is not giving everything all the time to pre-school."***

According to the teachers, there were few families suffering from the problem of unemployment. The head teacher commented: "To live in the country, really, you have to be employed [otherwise it's not possible to stay]".

The Papanui community (the only community being visited in 1988 which had received visits from the mobile pre-school unit from the outset) was reported by the head teacher as being particularly keen to safeguard the continuing provision of the mobile unit's services in the local area. She stated:

> ***"When they [the farmers at Papanui] are appointing staff, they will only appoint people with pre-schoolers and school children, basically to keep the mobile unit going out there and to keep the school open. For example, they will employ a cook with***

> ***children; an unmarried mother I think they advertised for last time, which I think they appointed over and above a person without children."***

Factors in the Community which can Affect Sessions

As the communities served by the Hunterville mobile unit relied for their existence on farming, the seasonal events of the farming year sometimes had a significant effect on attendance at sessions. The teachers reported that attendance dropped markedly at shearing times when mothers were unable to take time out from their farming commitments to bring their children to sessions.

Lamb and calf days and other special school-based activities were also important cyclical events, drawing a large turn out from the community in general. On such occasions, because most of the local pre-schoolers attended the school along with their parents and older siblings, the mobile pre-school unit abandoned attempts to run normal sessions and went along to the school as well. (The teachers were able to interact with children and parents there and also found that the common experience was valuable as a source of discussion and of follow-up activities in subsequent sessions.)

Occasionally, other circumstances were reported to affect sessions: for example, when one of the (predominantly Maori) Taihape groups needed to use the hall in which the mobile unit met for a tangi, the session had to be cancelled on that day. (The teachers, instructed by their local kindergarten association and the Department of Education, instead spent the time on administration and planning work in their office and held a replacement session for the group on the afternoon which would normally have been devoted to administration. The teachers stated, however, that although this switch worked satisfactorily on the occasion in question, it was seldom feasible to alter session times, not only because of the mobile unit's itinerary but also because parents associated with the unit were busy people too and could not easily change their schedules at short notice.)

Other factors which could affect sessions

The teachers reported that when the weather was very cold the attendance level at sessions was likely to drop, sometimes significantly, as parents with babies and toddlers were reluctant to expose their children to the very cold halls where the groups met. Sometimes, too, sessions were either delayed or had to be cancelled altogether because of roads being closed for road works, usually as a result of storms causing slips or bringing trees down. (The head teacher reported that, on one occasion, a woman from the Papanui group sent her husband out with a chainsaw to clear the road of trees which had been blown down by high winds in the night in order to enable the mobile unit's van to reach the venue and conduct the session as usual.) In doubtful weather conditions, the coordinator from each group rang around all other parents in the area to check on road conditions; she would then notify the mobile unit teachers whether it would be possible for them to make the trip. (The teachers were very committed to providing a service to the rural areas which they visited and often drove out to sessions when the weather was very bad - something they would not have attempted to do if it were not for work purposes - and made every effort not to miss a session, although the final decision about this was made by the kindergarten association.)

The Children

The teachers stated that the Hunterville mobile unit "... does not exactly have a waiting list". The parents fill out an enrolment card for their child when she or he is aged two years, and then they are officially placed on the roll once they turn two-and-a-half years. Children younger than $2^1/_2$ years, however, did attend sessions with their mothers. The teachers recorded the number of such children who attended and they were considered to constitute the 'waiting list'. It was essential for most parents to bring along their very young children to sessions, as well as their older pre-schoolers, because of the considerable distances many had to travel to attend sessions in the first place (making it impossible - or at least, not feasible - to return home again during sessions) and also because there was seldom anyone else available to baby-sit these children in their mothers' absence.

Table 6.4 shows the numbers of children who were present at sessions during the fieldwork period while Table 6.5 shows the numbers present (according to the teachers) at the groups visited some weeks later.

Hunterville Mobile Pre-School Unit

Table 6.4: The number of children present at each of the sessions held by the Hunterville mobile pre-school unit during the fieldwork period

Name of group	Enrolled children[a]	Non-enrolled children[b]	Total number present
Monday			
Ongo Road (am)	8	5	13
Rata (pm)	10	3	13
Tuesday			
Taoroa (am)	9	5	14
Ohingaiti (pm)	3	4	7
Wednesday			
Papanui (pm)	8	4	12
Thursday			
Mataroa (am)	13	1	14
Moawhango (pm)	10	5	15
Friday			
Hunterville (am)	17	1	18

[a] At the Hunterville mobile pre-school unit children were officially enrolled at $2^{1}/_{2}$ years (although children could not attend without their parents until they were 3 years of age).

[b] Children under $2^{1}/_{2}$ years.

Table 6.5: The number of children present at sessions (as reported by teachers) during the week 18 to 22 July, 1988

Name of group	Enrolled children	Non-enrolled children	Total number present
Ongo Road	9	2	11
Rata	8	4	12
Taoroa	9	6	15
Ohingaiti	7	2	9
Papanui	5	2	7
Mataroa	8	4	12
Moawhango	3	6	9
Hunterville	19	1	20

The Hunterville Mobile Pre-School Unit Teachers' Philosophy for Working with Children

Because many of the children who attended sessions lived in isolated areas, the teachers who worked on the Hunterville mobile pre-school unit at the time the fieldwork was carried out endeavoured, first and foremost, to encourage children's social development. They also felt that it was important for children to develop independence and creativity. In the interview, the teachers were asked what they felt was an appropriate philosophy for working with children attending a (rural) mobile pre-school unit; one of the teachers commented as follows:

> ***"Probably the most important thing is getting these children to develop their own imagination and independence... We don't think it is important that they should be able to print their name and ... that the end product should be perfect. We are more interested that they have tried and used their skills, used their imagination, and do what they want to do, instead of what their parents want them to do. Hopefully, by the time they've finished with us and they go to school they should be able to relate to their teacher. Whereas if they haven't learned that skill, when they get to primary school they won't probably have such a good chance of learning straight away because they will be too scared - or too shy - of the teacher so it's really important for them to learn to be independent from their parents... The only really important thing with most of the children we see is for them to learn to play with their peers, to mix socially with children other than their brothers and sisters because often you find with our groups that there are all these children there but none of them playing together because they are not used to being with other children. They really enjoy coming to kindergarten and getting the activities, but they often aren't having any parallel play. That's why we like to try and encourage those sorts of things, and have different games and group stories and quite a few group things, whereas probably in a standard kindergarten they wouldn't stop and make all the kids take part in a particular activity, so we do try and encourage them right from when they are little to socialise."***

Apart from 'group sessions' (eg morning/afternoon tea-breaks and mat-times for singing and stories) the teachers followed the 'free play' philosophy. This was sometimes at variance with what parents felt they wanted: parents at some groups in particular preferred a more 'structured' approach which would ensure that their children always completed a concrete activity - such as producing a painting or some collage work - to take home to 'prove' that something had been accomplished during the session. There was also evidence of differences in teachers' and parents' understanding of what constituted an 'educational activity'. As one teacher stated:

> ***"Most of our groups don't have a large outdoor area because parents don't see large muscle development as being important [and are reluctant, in any case, to raise money for outdoor facilities that are only used once a week]. They feel that their children can go and climb fences or climb trees whenever they like at home. They see our job as providing art and craft activities and that sort of thing. Sandpits they see as a play item, they don't see it as an educational item, therefore most of our sandpits tend to be sand in a tyre which isn't really very practical."***

These contrasting views were an area of some frustration for the teachers; however, they tried to explain to parents as well as they could the importance of the free play philosophy and the value of certain standard pre-school activities in the hope that they would be able to convince at least some of the parents. Other than that, they made attempts to compromise between their own approach and that of the parents, for example, by ensuring there was at least one activity at each session which would result in a tangible outcome.

Because of the isolation of many of the communities served by the unit, and the unavailability of services often taken for granted in towns and cities, the teachers took a supply of books, additional to those used during the session itself, to each group so that the children could choose - on a 'lending library' basis - a book to take home each week. This was generally returned at the following week's session and replaced with another. This service was very much appreciated by children and parents alike: their only complaint was that they were not able to borrow books in more quantity.

The Parents

Teachers considered that the proportion of parents overall (with the exception of the session held at Hunterville on Friday mornings) who remained during sessions was around 95%. They further estimated that, of those who stayed, almost all talked to one or other of the teachers (often both) at least briefly at some stage during the session. Active participation by parents, whether working with the children or carrying out 'housekeeping tasks', was reported to vary at different groups and/or according to whether they (the teachers) required help with scheduled activities, but, on average, the teachers felt that between 50% and 75% of the parents who remained at sessions helped out in some way. Tables 6.6 and 6.7 record the actual numbers of parents who were present during sessions both during the fieldwork period and some weeks later. Parents were also reported by teachers to be responsible for fundraising activities and for organising working-bees to keep grass cut at venues and to help with maintenance and cleaning of buildings generally.

Table 6.6: The number of parents present at sessions run by the Hunterville mobile pre-school unit during the fieldwork period

Name of group/ time	Number of parents present all or most of session	Number of parents present for part of session	Total number of parents present[a]
Monday			
Ongo Road (am)	7	-	7
Rata (pm)	5	2	7
Tuesday			
Taoroa (am)	8	-	8
Ohingaiti (pm)	5	-	5
Wednesday			
Papanui (pm)	8	1	9
Thursday			
Mataroa (am)	7	2	9
Moawhango (pm)	5	2	7
Friday			
Hunterville (am)	1	1	2

[a] All parents present helped in some way during the session; the extent of parental involvement, however, varied between groups - see notes below on each session observed during the fieldwork period. (Figures do not include parents who called at the venue to collect or drop off their children and who often lingered for several minutes to talk to teachers and other parents.)

Table 6.7: The number of parents present (according to teachers) in the week 18 to 22 July, 1988

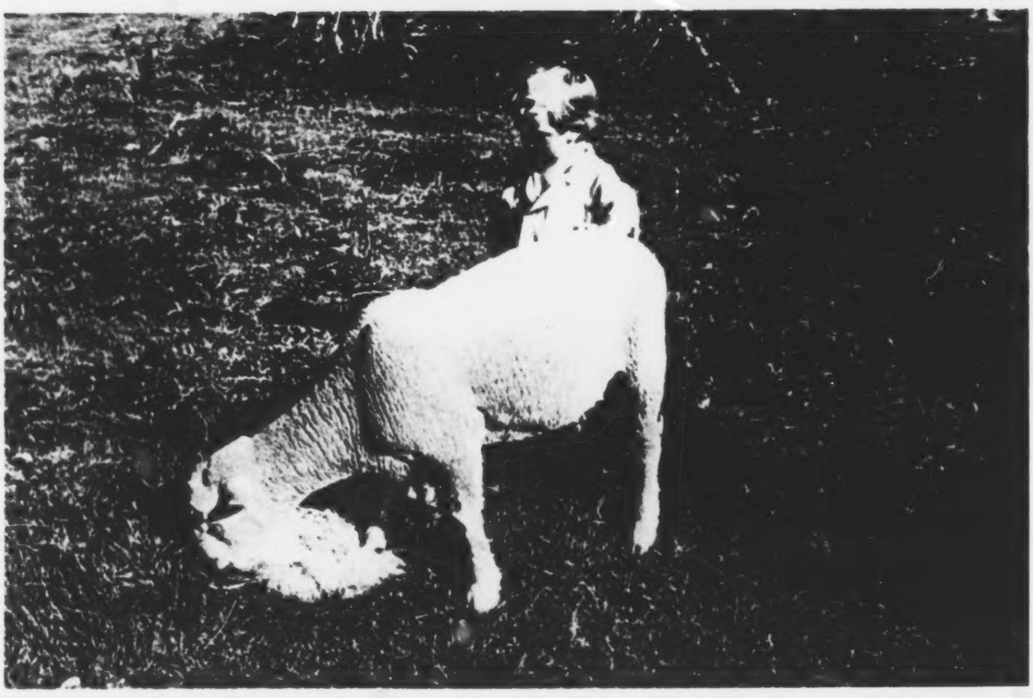
Name of group	Number of parents present for all or most of session
Ongo Road	4
Rata	6
Taoroa	8
Ohingaiti	6
Papanui	5
Mataroa	8
Moawhango	4
Hunterville	1

Social interaction amongst parents was an important part of the mobile unit sessions. In the isolated, rural communities served by the unit, many of the families which attended sessions did not have close neighbours and therefore valued the time spent at sessions to meet with other adults and their children. For this reason, parents frequently stayed and chatted together in the kitchen areas at venues, rather than where the children worked and played. Several groups provided formal morning or afternoon teas for the parents and staff (and visitors), thus revealing that the mobile unit's visits were an 'occasion' in the life of the rural communities in which the mobile unit worked.

Visits from the mobile unit, therefore, not only enabled children to interact with their peers and with adults outside their immediate family, but also provided an opportunity for parents to establish friendships and maintain contact with one another. Many parents commented (both informally to the researchers during the fieldwork period and in the questionnaire they were asked to complete for the study) on the valuable contribution that the mobile unit made to their community.

Although the teachers had "battles" with some parents over what and how children 'should' be learning, they welcomed parents at sessions (especially as they recognised that the parents had needs as well as their children) and felt that they generally related well to them on both a professional and a personal level. The teachers' views on parents are elaborated upon in more detail in Chapter 3 of Volume I of this report.

Outdoor play, Rata



Parents Running Other Sessions

Although parents associated with the Hunterville mobile pre-school unit seldom ran their own sessions on the days when the unit did not visit their group (see pages 263 to 266 of Volume I for a more in-depth discussion of this topic in relation to all nine mobile units) some parents took their children to kindergartens 'in town' (Taihape or Hunterville) when they visited there for shopping or business purposes every four to six weeks. The teachers were happy about that as they agreed with parents that it was beneficial for the children to have a different learning experience. A few children who attended the mobile unit were also enrolled in the Correspondence School early childhood education programme, even though under Department/Ministry of Education policy this was/is not permitted. Parents whose children were thus dually enrolled felt that their children would benefit not only from mixing with their peers and with adults at mobile unit sessions but also from the home activities provided by the correspondence programme. They felt that dual enrolment was one way of lessening the educationally disadvantaged position they considered their children to be in compared to their counterparts in towns and cities.

Facilities Available to the Hunterville Mobile Pre-School Unit

The mobile unit teachers were required to show considerable flexibility and initiative in order to adapt to the different conditions in the various venues used by the mobile unit, especially as all of them were to at least some extent shared with other groups or individuals.

While particular features of each of the venues visited are described below on page 297 following, the teachers, in turn, had the following comments to make about facilities in general. The first teacher stated:

> ***"The Taoroa group can be a problem in the winter because the grass gets so wet we can't get the van up the hill so everything has got to be carried. The session we hold [in a private house at Ongo Road] is supposed to be held in the woolshed but there we can either be inside or outside, we can't use both so if it's a sunny day we have to set up outside in the paddock, and in the winter we have to set up everything inside. There is no proper accessway between inside and outside so we therefore have to use pieces of [corrugated] iron which [because it could be dangerous] is another thing that was taken into consideration when we decided to shift to [the house].***
>
> ***Permanently sharing accommodation can be a bit of a pain though it sort of comes part and parcel of the job. As far as packing up goes, most of the halls are fairly***

> ***good. Sometimes, if no one else is using them during the week we can actually leave them set up between sessions but I think there are only two where we can do that at the moment. Heating is a problem - it's absolutely freezing in the winter but you tend to dress with layers and layers of clothing as in woollen tights and woollen socks and woollen vests and things like that. It is easier to strip off if it gets hot than it is to work in cold conditions.***
>
> ***I prefer to use halls [rather than smaller buildings], basically because of the size, because we have got room to spread out. If a venue is too small you lose the concept of a free playing area and you tend to have to do activities in relays. To try and change [where a group meets] we have to actually sit down and talk to the parents [and explain why the change is necessary]. There were a couple of parents who weren't too happy, their opinion was 'if you have been using the venue for how ever many years, why is it suddenly not suitable?' It [the Rata venue] has never been suitable but the topic had never been approached before. Once we explained to the parents, yes, they could understand, they could see what the problems were and therefore they were quite happy to move and they also had a look around and found an alternative venue which we went and saw and then we had to apply to the association who notified the department. It's a little bit frustrating that we are still using a really, really small venue when we have got a suitable venue further up the road because the department has not gotten around to coming and checking it and that is frustrating, it's annoying. I sort of feel now that it has gone on for nearly two months, which is too long because it really is very important. And once again I sort of see us as not getting the professional back-up that we need."***

The second teacher commented in similar vein:

> ***"We are trying to change our venue at Rata at the moment because it's much too small and we have found, in fact, that a lot of the children from Rata are the children who we are specifically working with now to develop their basic skills because they haven't learnt these basic skills at their own session and they come into the town session [ie the additional session held in Hunterville on Friday mornings for the Rata and Ongo Road groups and anyone one else who is able to attend] and really don't know what to do because they haven't had the space to develop those skills. Because of the lack of space it's not encouraging to them or enticing or interesting because they are so crammed and there is only really room for one child to do each thing at a time.***

> ***At most of the venues we really haven't got anywhere proper to store the equipment and if we have to pack everything away because someone else is going to use the hall it can be difficult. And a lot of [venues] haven't really got great fencing, although that isn't really such a problem - it's more that some [outdoor play areas] are too small and others are quite big [making it more difficult to supervise]. And there are paddocks full of long grass which has to be kept trimmed down and of course they put sheep in to eat it which we are not very happy about because then we have manure. There are heating problems of course in the winter - you can imagine how cold some of those halls are. It's just so cold that neither the children nor us can concentrate on what we are doing. And the opposite extreme is that it gets so hot outside in summer - you don't want to stay inside because some of the places are so dark and dingy - that the children are lethargic and you are lethargic and it's just hopeless, especially at the places where there aren't any trees.***
>
> ***Another thing that we are concerned about with our venues is that we don't get checked up on very often by, say, the Health Department. Some of our venues are quite disgusting health-wise and we could be susceptible to picking up various diseases in some of these venues, like the water leaves a lot to be desired in some of them, and the toilet facilities. And sometimes there is no water and sometimes there have been rats or opossums so you sometimes think it would be nice to have things checked now and again."***

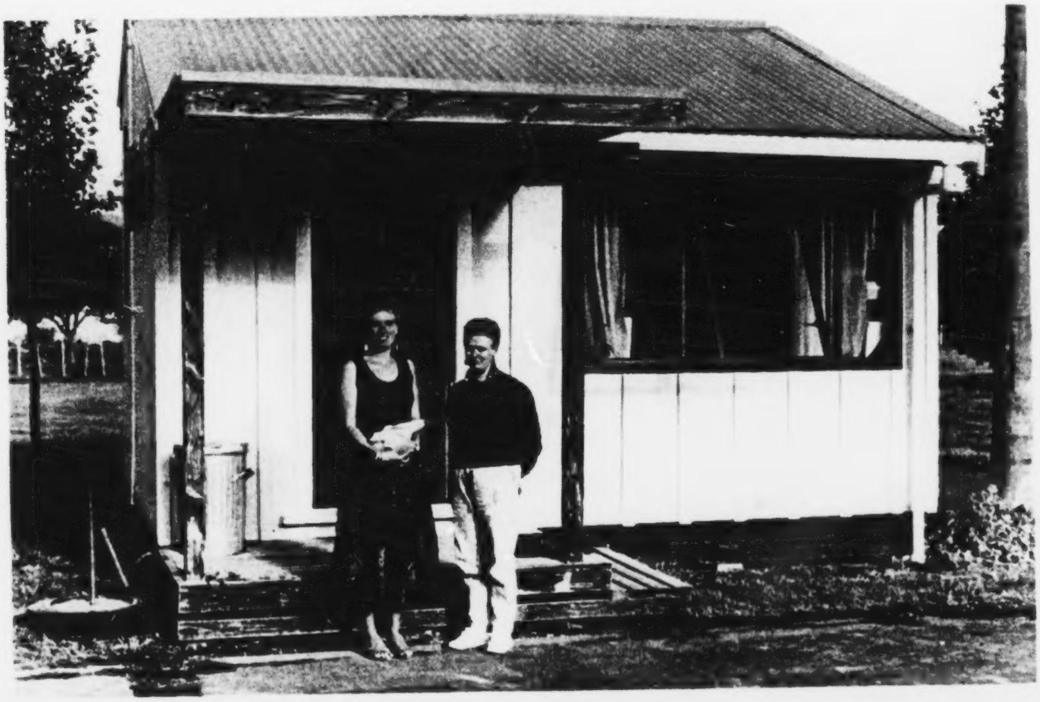
As well as equipment having to be packed away at the end of sessions - often a burdensome task for both parents and teachers - the need to share facilities with other community groups also meant that children's art work was not displayed on the walls, which was disappointing for children, parents, and teachers alike. These were factors that some parents liked least about the mobile unit, for example, two parents commented in the Parent Questionnaire as follows:

> ***"The fact that everything has to be completely put away after each session. There are no posters, children's work etc on the walls due to the fact that other organisations also use the buildings. Surroundings aren't as stimulating as a permanent kindy. Packing the van on rainy days!"***

> ***"Some venues have been freezing in winter, impossible to heat, also dark and with very poor outside area eg woolshed and yards [where the Rata group formerly met]."***

The Facilities Available to the Teachers for Administration and Planning Work

The teachers were able to carry out their administrative and planning tasks in their office, a prefabricated shed converted for their specific purposes. The office was a small, one-room building, located in the grounds of the Hunterville primary school.



A researcher and one of the teachers outside the Hunterville mobile pre-school unit's office

In the early days of its operation, the mobile unit had had no base in which to store equipment and carry out programme planning, and arrangements were made to use a little room at the Hunterville Playcentre. This, however, proved unsatisfactory as there was not adequate access for the van and the teachers did not have sole use of the room. Throughout 1979, equipment used by the mobile unit had to be stored in a garage in Marton; later, it was stored at a succession of private farmhouses. To try and end this unsatisfactory state of affairs, a proposal was put to the Department of Education that the mobile unit have its own office-cum-storage facilities. In 1981, a tender was finally accepted for the provision of such a building to go ahead. (In order to save on costs, the teachers at the time agreed to use the toilet facilities at the Hunterville school instead of having their own installed; this arrangement continued to stand in 1988.)

At the time of the fieldwork, the teachers felt that they had no major problems with their office facilities as they could drive the van up to the door, ready for packing and unloading. Smaller equipment was able to be stored on shelves in the shed and the teachers had desk space in which to carry out administrative tasks during their two, $2^1/_2$ hour non child-contact sessions each week. The shelves had only recently been installed and had meant a great improvement in effectively organising the storage of equipment.

Although their office was small, the teachers felt that it was much better to have their own base rather than have to share quarters with others. One teacher put it as follows:

> ***"We have got a very small office but it's better than no office. It's probably really good because I know in Waimate [mobile pre-school unit] that they have to share the office with the teachers in the kindergarten that they are based at, which would be really horrible. I mean it would be good to have contact with other teachers, to have that professional support, but it would also be distracting. And I guess you probably wouldn't have a lot of space."***

The Van and Transportation of Equipment and Materials

In common with most of the other units, the Hunterville mobile pre-school was initially provided with a former school-service bus by the Department of Education for the transportation of both teachers and equipment to venues. (Although the early teachers found the Ford Transit van with which they had been supplied to be large and unwieldy, it was considered, at the time, that the roads to the various venues were too hazardous to allow teachers to use an ordinary car for transport.) Despite the fact that the Ford Transit vehicle was only to be a temporary arrangement, it was not until the beginning of 1981 that the then teachers were supplied with a modern, and much more convenient van, properly fitted with shelves for the more efficient storage of equipment.

At the time the fieldwork was carried out the teachers were using a very late model Ford Bedford Econovan which, for ease of access to its contents, featured a sliding door on one side as well as a hatchback door at the back. The van had seating for three in the front; metal racks, on which to store equipment, lined both sides of the rear of the van. The floor space behind the teachers' seat was used for larger, more irregular-shaped objects (blackboard, painting easels, floor covers) and for boxes of equipment too big to fit on the shelves. Most groups owned some items of furniture (such as tables and chairs) of their own, and these, along with some of the more bulky, heavy pieces of equipment (eg a portable swing) were generally able to be stored at the venues. Being able to carry smaller equipment in the van allowed the teachers to change activities regularly - if everything used during sessions was stored at venues, then it would probably be used only once a week when the mobile unit visited that area rather than being shared by all groups.

Overnight, and during weekends, the van was stored in the school bus garage within the grounds of the Hunterville primary school.

Some of the van's contents

Some Aspects of Providing the Mobile Unit Service - The Teachers' Experience

The head teacher stated that one of the main problems for her in relation to administrative aspects of her job was that, despite having a telephone in the mobile unit's office, she still had to conduct some kindergarten business at home after hours. This was largely because, during the working day, she was unable to be contacted due to travelling to and from sessions and being at venues which did not have a telephone. (This was an aspect of the job that she most disliked.)

Information on Department of Education files suggests that the Hunterville mobile pre-school unit's local kindergarten association has always had considerably more direct input into the mobile unit than kindergarten associations connected with some of the other units. This, however, did not always suit the teachers. For example, the teachers stated that they found it very frustrating that it was the kindergarten association, rather than themselves, which made the final decision on whether to cancel or re-schedule a session. They felt that as they were the ones who were in constant communication with the parents in the areas they served and were most familiar with the demands of their families' lifestyles, that it would be more appropriate to make that decision themselves. They commented as follows:

> ***"If the [possible] cancellation is due to road conditions we have got to phone through to the [kindergarten association] office and notify them, and they will be the ones who decide whether we go out or not if it is snowing [etc], so they decide whether we put our lives in our hands - it's not left up to us... I see myself as a professional. There is no way I am going to cancel a session unless I think it is really, really important [or necessary] to cancel a session and I don't see why some of that decision can't be left up to us and notifying them of what we are doing later... In towns and cities [where the kindergarten associations are based] they are not aware of the needs and the remoteness of the country areas."***

The teachers felt, therefore, that the kindergarten association did not always recognise them as professional people capable of making responsible, appropriately informed decisions affecting the unit. They felt that the problem was compounded by the kindergarten association being physically isolated from the mobile unit which in turn made it more difficult for those who worked in the organisation to understand or recognise the problems and conditions peculiar to a mobile unit and which were unlikely to be encountered by staff at a standard kindergarten in a town or city.

A 'Typical' Day or Week on the Hunterville Mobile Pre-School Unit

The teachers stated in their interviews that they had a very busy schedule that left them feeling extremely tired by the end of the week. A typical day involved driving for up to an hour, often over difficult stretches of country roads, to reach a morning destination and then immediately unpacking equipment and materials from the van on arrival. Equipment had to set up at all venues, although it was possible to store furniture and larger items of equipment at some places. The teachers then conducted a two hour session (or three hours for the Friday morning group) with the children.

The programme tended to be very flexible to take advantage of any educational opportunities that arose. During the week of observation, for example, the programme that had been planned for the session at one venue was suspended because a traffic officer who had been visiting a neighbouring school 'dropped in' on the mobile unit session. The traffic officer then explained her job to the children, and led the group in singing and chanting some road safety songs and rhymes.

The teachers made a real effort to talk with parents at all sessions, both on a professional level and also to exchange 'local gossip'. Some of the parents were so isolated geographically that, most weeks, almost their only contact with other adults outside the home was when the mobile unit visited their area. In this way, the teachers saw the mobile unit as playing a very important part in providing parents with the opportunity to mix socially and to observe the development of other children.

At the close of each morning session, the teachers (helped by parents) packed up the equipment that had been used and returned it to the van before driving to the next venue. Lunch either constituted a hurried stop or was 'eaten on the run'. The teachers stated that they used the time spent travelling in the van to and from venues to discuss - and informally evaluate - individual children's progress. As the next destination was often an hour's drive away this gave the teachers plenty of time for discussion and reflection on the previous session.

The constant travelling, and lack of opportunity for teachers to rest between sessions, was in large part responsible for feelings of extreme fatigue at the week's end. In addition, the head teacher reported that parents often rang her at home in the evenings and at weekends to discuss their child's progress or other concerns, which made it harder to put aside the pressures of work at the end of the day and get some necessary relaxation. (Not having access to a phone during the working day was one of the most difficult aspects of the job for this teacher.) However, despite their fatigue and various frustrations associated with the mobile nature of their work, the teachers nevertheless rated their overall job satisfaction and feelings of enjoyment very highly. One teacher commented:

> ***"I really enjoy the job and there is a tremendous level of job satisfaction but at the same time there are so many frustrations with working with some parents and the powers that be that you sometimes feel like throwing in the towel!"***

DESCRIPTION OF EACH VENUE VISITED AND SESSION HELD BY THE HUNTERVILLE MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT DURING THE FIELDWORK PERIOD

At 8.30am on the Monday morning, the researchers met the teachers at their base outside the Hunterville primary school and then followed (in a rental car) the mobile unit's van to the first session for the week, held at Ongo Road, six kilometres from Hunterville.

ONGO ROAD: MONDAY MORNING, 21 MARCH 1988

Location and Facilities

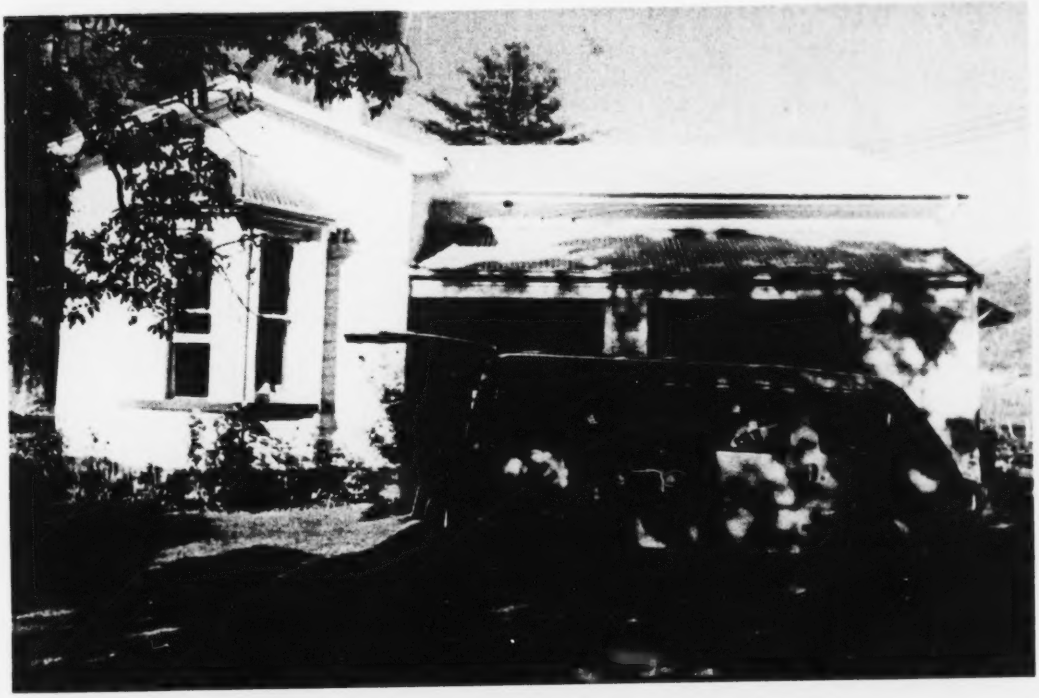
The Ongo Road group met in the home - a large, old, wooden house - of one of the families whose child attended mobile unit sessions; the host mother had been a former head teacher on the mobile unit. At the time the fieldwork was carried out, the house had yet to be approved as a suitable venue by the local kindergarten association and the Department of Education. (The group previously met in a woolshed on a nearby property but had ceased to do so because the location was not, for various reasons, thought suitable for pre-schoolers.)

Not unexpectedly, with it being a private home, there were no displays of children's art work or posters on the walls. Anywhere that paint, glue, or dough was being used, black polythene had been laid down to protect the carpet. A piano in the lounge was used by the group for a sing-along during the session. Large cushions and long fabric snakes were also placed on the floor of the lounge for children to sit on during mat-time, and when working at various activities.

Most of the equipment made available during the session was set up inside the house, the majority of which was supplied from the contents of the mobile unit's van rather than from supplies belonging to the group itself.

The lounge was a large, open room with plenty of natural light, kept pleasantly warm by means of a Kent fire. As the cosy atmosphere in the living room seemed especially appropriate for children who wished to work quietly on an activity either alone or with others, the teachers chose to make books, puzzles, and board games available there. Equipment for more 'active' indoor pastimes, such as collage work, dough play, and painting, were set up in the dining room, on the verandah, and in the porch. The children were also provided with a small clothes line, placed in the hall, on which to hang wet paintings to dry.

Hunterville Mobile Pre-School Unit



At the Ongo Road venue

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Hunterville Mobile Pre-School Unit

A very long front lawn, with well-established trees lining its perimeter, provided the outdoor play area. It was fenced around all sides, and a cattle stop at the front gate discouraged children from leaving the property. The children were instructed to stay in front of the house so that they remained always in view. There was a set of swings in the garden but no other outdoor play equipment.

The Session

The session was underway by 9am, after about 18 minutes spent unpacking the van and setting up equipment. There was mainly free play, with children working in small groups at the different activities which were available. The teachers, and also the parents present, divided their time between the various groups of children or talked with children on a one-to-one basis. The children were very settled, with no running around. The special activity for the morning was making leaf prints on paper, using different coloured paints and paint rollers. Early in the session, the teachers, with the help of several children, gathered a variety of differently-shaped and textured leaves from around the garden. Other activities, aside from the dough table, painting easels, and books and puzzles, included the collage table (glue, plastic containers, a variety of cardboard boxes, pieces of different textured materials, and crayons) and blackboard and chalks. The family cat, strolling through the house, also created a diversion for children.

Morning tea, from 10.10am to 10.25am, was held outside on the lawn, although a large piece of polythene was put down for the children to sit on as the grass was still wet from a frost. Everybody, adults and children alike, gathered for the morning break and as it was a beautiful, sunny morning it was an enjoyable social occasion. There was fruit juice for the children, tea or coffee for the adults and - supplied by the parent on duty - freshly baked muffins for all. After morning tea, the children had an opportunity to run around outside before meeting for mat-time in the lounge at 10.45am. During mat-time - accompanied by one of the teachers playing the piano - the children sang songs, did exercises and finger play, and listened to a story. An optional 'homework' task, based on the story that the children had been read, was set for children and parents to work on together before the next session in a week's time.

Making leaf prints, Ongo Road

The session was somewhat disrupted because it was the turn of children in the area to receive their Hepatitis B vaccinations, as part of a nation-wide endeavour to inoculate all children in the 'at risk' age group. This meant that some parents and children arrived late to the session, while others left early, depending on when they were scheduled to receive the vaccination. There were, however, 13 children present for most of the session, eight of whom were of enrolled age, and five of whom were less than 2$^1/_2$ years of age. (It was difficult to distinguish during the session which children were on the roll and which were not, as all children present seemed to take part in activities to a similar extent; the only difference, perhaps, was that the younger children tended to interact more with their parents than with the teachers.)

The session ended at 11am, although the teachers spent a further 10 minutes or so completing the packing of the van. The teachers commented that as most children at this session were around 3 to 3$^1/_2$ years - with some even younger - a two hour session was long enough. As the venue for this group was not very far from Hunterville and their office, the teachers were able to return there to complete some administrative and planning tasks before it was time to set off for the afternoon session at Rata, also quite close to the Hunterville township. (Monday was the only day of the week that the teachers were able to take a proper lunch-break and eat at their leisure.)

Parents

Six of the seven mothers present for all or almost all of the session divided their time between working on an individual basis with children and interacting with one another and with the teachers. (The seventh parent was on duty and therefore also responsible for preparing the morning tea and clearing up again afterwards.) The adults discussed local events such as the upcoming rugby and hockey centennial, their children, the pregnancies of two of the mothers present, and the current fundraising activity for their mobile group: one mother was selling tickets for the fashion parade which had been planned.

After morning tea, while the children were playing outside, the parents washed the paint and glue containers and helped to tidy up and pack away most equipment; most parents, however, chose to sit in with the children while mat-time was underway.

One of the teachers later remarked that she felt that the leaf print activity, a focus of the morning's session, was probably enjoyed more by the parents than by the children. She felt that this was because parents were actively able to help their child complete something which they could take home: even very young children, who either were not interested or did not seem to understand the aim of the activity (some were unable even to hold the paint roller) were helped to make a print by their parents. Apparently, the women associated with this group felt that it was particularly important that children produce something tangible to take home to their fathers, thus proving that the session had been 'worthwhile'. Although teachers did not go along with this view, preferring instead to emphasise the development of social skills, imagination, and independence, they compromised by ensuring that they always incorporated an activity into each session which would produce the sort of result that the parents desired. The differences in views held by parents and teachers did not, however, mean that these parents did not think highly of their mobile unit. Comments made in the parent questionnaire showed that they very much appreciated the service provided; for example:

> ***"Hard to say what I like best as there are many things I like equally but probably the opportunity for my daughter and myself to mix with other mothers and children in a comfortable, relaxed, well organised atmostphere."***

RATA: MONDAY AFTERNOON, 21 MARCH 1988

Location and Facilities

Rata, eight kilometres from Hunterville, was the location of the second session for the week. The group met in a small three-room bach on farm property, the owners living closeby. Because the facilities were too small when the entire group (parents and children) was together, the site was thought unsuitable. For this reason, parents associated with the Rata group had requested - after being encouraged by the teachers - a move to an empty three-bedroom house in the locality but, at the time the fieldwork was carried out[5] , were awaiting kindergarten association and Department of Education approval to make the move. The frustration that parents (and teachers) from this group felt with the available facilities are well illustrated in the following comments made by respondents to the parent questionnaire:

> ***"... we need a bigger place. We have had a house offered and all it needs is a working bee of mothers and it will be shipshape and hopefully the Department will OK it. The children really need the room to do things, especially when it's wet outside. Where we are now, if a story has to be read, it has to wait until paintings and drawings are all packed up."***

---

[5] Four months later it was learned, by means of the diaries completed by the teachers for the purposes of this study, that the Rata group had moved into the three-bedroomed house.

Making leaf prints, Rata

Learning action songs during mat-time at Rata

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Hunterville Mobile Pre-School Unit

> ***"Cramped, stuffy conditions. Totally unsuitable in wet conditions. Children can't move inside when it is raining. I don't go when the weather is bad."***

The bach, as well as being small, was sparsely furnished and decorated: although there were children's paintings on one wall, the remaining walls were bare; there was no carpet on the floor. Furniture consisted of a couch, two tables, some large floor cushions, and the fabric 'snakes' from the van. No equipment for the children's use was stored on-site.

The area available for outdoor play - half an acre of a former orchard - was both extensive and exciting for the children. As shown in the photographs on page 302, there was, as well as a number of old fruit trees, plenty of grass for the children to play on. There were also tall thistles, some boulders, and a number of sheep which shared the space. Outdoor equipment included a tree-house in one of the farthest corners of the orchard (a popular retreat for children) and, closer to the farm house, a sandpit, climbing apparatus, swings, a slide, and a see-saw.

The Session

As it was a sunny afternoon, the majority of equipment was set up outside. There were carpentry tools and bench, a table on which to make leaf prints, dressing up clothes, puzzles, board games, and a book corner. A large rug was placed on the grass for children to sit on while playing with the puzzle boards and looking at books.

Inside, a smaller amount of equipment was made available. This included easels, paints, and collage materials set out in one room, and the dough table and more books in another. The books were placed in the room containing the large floor cushions. Tape recorded music played in the background.

During the first half of the session the children were mainly involved in small group work outside. Under the guidance of one teacher, all enrolled children present (10 in all) also completed a leaf print. Once every child had completed their print this activity was packed away by one of the parents rostered on duty. Leaf printing, woodwork, and dressing up were the most popular activities, particularly the latter two, with children spending considerable time on these. The dressing up clothes, plus hats and shoes, provided ample opportunities for children to engage in dramatic play. A few children did spend time inside during the afternoon, where they completed paintings or collage work. The two toddlers who attended the session, while not able to attempt a leaf print or other activities of similar difficulty, spent much of their time following the older children around. (A baby spent most of the session sleeping.)

Hunterville Mobile Pre-School Unit

Afternoon tea was taken outside on the rug, with everyone having a cold drink. The afternoon break lasted for about 10 minutes, with children, teachers, and parents spending time chatting with one another. At approximately 2.45pm, all children went inside with one of the teachers for music and a story. The session ended at 3.05pm.

Parents

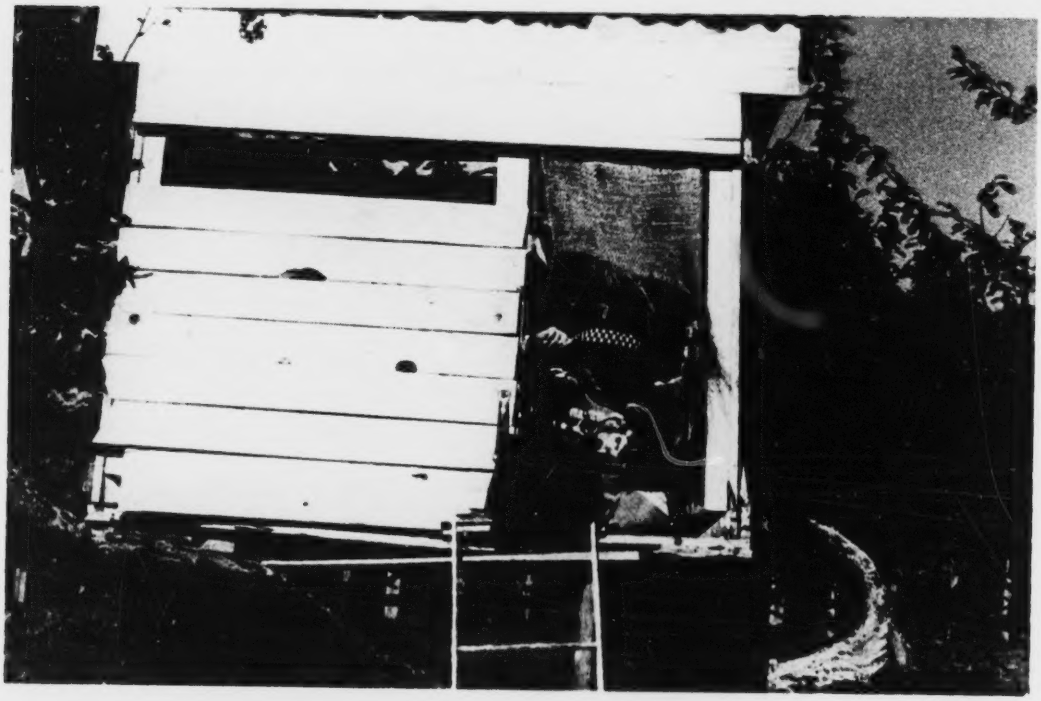
While a father and two mothers simply stayed long enough to drop off and later collect their children, five mothers remained throughout the session and a further two spent half an hour or so observing before leaving. They had arranged for their children to be returned home at the end of the afternoon by one of the other parents.

Two of the five parents who remained throughout were rostered for duty, with their main tasks being to help set up equipment and pack it away again. Some of the equipment was made ready for packing into the van by the time the children gathered for their afternoon break; most of the remaining packing and tidying was completed while the children were occupied as a group with singing and stories. The teachers remarked that help given by parents at this group greatly facilitated the smooth running of the session.

All five parents also spent time during the afternoon interacting with their own and other children, helping them with different activities and supervising them on the swings and at the slide and see-saw. Parents also chatted to the teachers, both while working with or near children or just on a one-to-one basis with no children involved; they also chatted amongst themselves. A major discussion point at this session was the hepatitis B vaccinations which many of the children had received that morning (this was not an apparent cause of distress for any of the children present); other topics for discussion included likely activities for the following week's session, their hopes and plans for the group's prospective new venue, and general community news.

Parents from the Rata group had many positive comments to make about visits from the mobile unit, with one parent, for example, stating that:

> ***"I like everything about it, and it would be a terrible blow to country life if it ever stopped."***



Using the tree-house and dressing up, Rata

Carpentry, Rata venue

Parents not only cited benefits for their children in terms of receiving a pre-school education, but also for themselves, as it provided an opportunity to talk with others:

> ***"I personally like seeing my children enjoying themselves, also getting to talk to other mums."***

TAOROA: TUESDAY MORNING, 22 MARCH 1988

Taoroa, 55 kilometres from Hunterville, was probably the most isolated location of all those visited by the mobile pre-school unit. The teachers had to undertake a trip of approximately one hour (the time depending on road and weather conditions), half the distance being over unsealed back roads, to reach this group.

Location and Facilities

The group met in the Taoroa community hall, a large wooden building. Near the hall was a small school but there was no other sign of a built-up community. The building consisted of a very large main hall, containing a stage and a number of long bench seats placed around the perimeter of the room. A single toilet, not a particularly encouraging site, was situated behind the stage. The main hall was poorly lit and therefore rather gloomy; also, heating provisions were sketchy, making the hall feel very cold, especially as the weather on this occasion was unseasonably cool and there were not nearly enough people present to fill - and help warm - the available space. A kitchen, leading from the main hall, completed the building's facilities.

The community hall was situated on a large, fenced-off piece of land. Several sheep were kept within the grounds to help keep the grass to a manageable length. The only permanent outdoor equipment available for this group was a sandpit made out of a large tractor tyre.

For the session, several child-sized tables and chairs - stored at the hall - were brought out for the children to work at. Sheets of black polythene were put down to protect the wooden floor from paint and glue, and rugs and the fabric snakes were placed in one corner of the hall to make it more comfortable and attractive for the children. Books and puzzles were placed in this area.

Other activities and equipment set up inside the hall included the play dough table, easel and painting materials, the collage table, dressing up clothes, and large wooden toys. Tape recorded music playing in the background helped make the hall feel more like a 'proper' kindergarten setting, as did a series of children's paintings hung up along one wall. (There were, however, no posters or art work on the other walls which made it difficult to brighten the overall environment.)

Although the sun was shining by the time the teachers reached the venue, the grass was still thawing from a frost and the air temperature remained cold. In order to provide a choice of working environments, however, the teachers set up the leaf printing activity - the 'theme' for the week - outside. Spades and metal tractors and trucks were also placed in the sandpit ready for the children to use.

The Session

There were 14 children present at the session, including two babies and three toddlers. Prior to morning tea, all nine children of enrolled age, plus - to a lesser extent - two of the toddlers, spent time working at the activities of their choice with either a teacher and/or one or more parents nearby to offer assistance and encouragement as required. All children tried several different activities, although the sandpit was a major attraction for around half of the children present. Two or three of the older children worked cooperatively to make roads, bridges, and tunnels within the sandpit. One teacher devoted herself to working on a one-to-one basis with each child, helping them to complete a leaf print. There were also plenty of

Doughplay at Taoroa

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verbal exchanges, and sometimes conversation, between teacher and individual children while this activity was underway. Children awaiting their turn to do a leaf print (in common with parents at the Ongo Road group, tangible evidence of their time at kindergarten was something that pleased the Taoroa parents and helped fulfil their expectations of what children 'should' be doing at pre-school) generally occupied themselves in the sandpit which was nearby.

Morning tea, held inside the hall, was a break enjoyed by everyone, as much for the social interaction, as for the delicious home baking supplied by the parent on duty. The morning break lasted for approximately 20 minutes - from 10.50am to around 11.10am.

Following morning tea, a community traffic officer arrived to talk to the children. The traffic officer's visit had not been formally arranged beforehand: she had been visiting the nearby primary school and the head teacher took the opportunity to go over to the school and ask if she would be able to spare the time to address the mobile unit group. (The teachers explained to the researchers that they had to take advantage of such situations as they arose because the itinerant nature of the unit meant that it was difficult to coordinate its schedule with that of potential visitors who, like the teachers, often had to travel large distances to attend groups.)

The traffic officer allowed the children to look inside her car; she also worked the lights for

The community traffic officer's visit to the Taoroa group

them. She then took the children back inside for a chat about traffic safety and to sing a few topical songs. When the traffic officer had finished, the children remained where they were for mat-time, which was led by one teacher while the other teacher worked with the parents to tidy away and pack up. The group, with evident enjoyment, sang more songs, some accompanied by actions which they had learned at previous sessions and listened to a story.

Parents

Some of the parents who attended this session had driven for an hour from even more isolated areas than Taoroa itself, and for most of these adults and their children, this was the only contact they were likely to have all week with others outside their families.

Although parents and their children began arriving during the unpacking of equipment, none participated in the session in any way at this point. Seven mothers and a (solo) father stayed for the duration of the session. At least five parents worked with the children at different times throughout the morning. The father spent the whole time working with his children and did not interact at all with the other parents until he had been there for an hour or more, and even then not to the same extent as the others.

One mother whose turn it was to organise the morning tea had provided a selection of foods for the adults' consumption, as, amongst the parents, morning tea was an integral part of what they clearly regarded as an important weekly social event. Conversation amongst parents - which took up most of the morning - included discussion of the fashion parade that was to be held to raise money for the group, discussion of their children's health, development, and behaviour, and more general discussion about community and other events.

Taoroa parents were very enthusiastic and supportive of the mobile unit. The isolated nature of their community meant that the unit not only fulfilled an important pre-school educational need but also enabled parents to meet on a regular basis. The teachers felt that the opportunity to watch the development of children other than their own and to discuss their child's progress with other adults was reassuring for these parents. (The teachers, however, were also aware of the dangers of parents comparing their children with others and were careful to take steps whenever possible - for example, by providing parents with appropriate **factual** information about child development - to discourage parents from making disadvantageous, and perhaps harmful, comparisons, whether about their own, or other people's children.)

Hunterville Mobile Pre-School Unit

Parents from this group gave responses such as the following when asked in the Parent Questionnaire what they liked best about their mobile pre-school unit:

> ***"The mobile pre-school unit is an excellent service for those like us out in the country. They [the teachers] are well prepared in all aspects of pre-schooling, and encouragement for the children to join in the activities is overwhelming. A benefit for us, all the way round."***
>
> ***"The mobile pre-school unit offers a valuable and very much needed programme for pre-schoolers. There is a definite 'readiness' for school noted in those children who have attended the mobile unit compared with those unable to attend."***

However, parents often expressed a wish for more frequent visits by the mobile unit. One parent's response to the question asking what they liked least about the unit was typical of the feelings expressed by others at this location:

> ***"What I like least is the fact that it only comes one morning weekly to our neighbouring community and the fact that children cannot be dually enrolled in the Correspondence Pre-School Programme. Because of the above the children are definitely disadvantaged."***

OHINGAITI: TUESDAY AFTERNOON, 22 MARCH 1988

Location and Facilities

The drive from Taoroa to Ohingaiti took about 35 minutes, leaving no time for a lunch stop between the morning and afternoon sessions. The Ohingaiti domain (sports room and grounds) served as the location for this session. The rooms were small and the equipment was set up in a room that was about half the size of a typical classroom and had an adjoining kitchen. Although small, the facilities available to the group were an appropriate size for the number of children who customarily attended (around 10). There were no posters or displays of children's art work on the walls; a few old sporting photographs were the only additions. Polythene sheets and rugs were put down to cover the floor and there was a number of wooden benches to sit on. Natural light from the windows lit the room well.

The outdoor area was huge and included the sports playing areas, a small sand-pit, swings, and some trees. A fence surrounded the area.

The sports club rooms where the Ohingaiti group met

The Session

Several children who usually attended the group were absent for this session. Of the seven children present, only three were on the roll. The remaining four included a baby who was either lying on the mat, with its mother, or with one of the teachers, and a 16-month-old whose mother worked with the child as much as possible. The other two were old enough to join in with the older children.

As there were so few children at the session and it was a pleasant day, the work space was not cramped and the session proceeded at a leisurely pace, both teachers being able to spent all of their time working with children, and talking to parents, on a one-to-one basis.

Equipment from the van which was set up inside included the easel, paper and paints, playdough, the collage table, books, puzzle boards, library box, and some toys suitable for babies and toddlers. Outside, the woodwork table, the leaf print activity, and metal trucks, tractors and other 'farm machinery' for use in the sandpit were set out.

Children engaged in free rather than structured play, and finger painting was a common activity inside. As would be expected, given the age of the children, most exhibited either solitary or parallel play, except in the sandpit where the older children worked cooperatively. One of the teachers made a point of spending extra time with one child, including taking him for a walk, as he had recently been demonstrating 'behaviour problems' and, with the reduced roll numbers today, this seemed a good opportunity to spend some concentrated time with him.

Parents

There were five parents present for the whole of the session, three of whom worked with the children on a mainly one-to-one basis. All five parents helped the teachers with the packing-up. Other parents borrowed and/or returned library books, interacted with teachers and/or with their children, and participated in some of the activities put out for the children. (Painting pictures was a popular activity with parents as well as with the children!) Discussion between parents focused on their children and on the fashion parade planned to raise money for the mobile unit.

PAPANUI: WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON, 23 MARCH 1988

Location and Facilities

The Papanui community hall was about a 50 minute drive from Hunterville, along a road that was unsealed, uneven, and narrow for a considerable part of the journey. The teachers were again prevented from taking a lunch break; however (for the researchers, at least), the striking scenery made up for this.

The hall was an old, wooden building, somewhat dilapidated and with poor lighting, even with the electric lights on. The Kent fire provided sufficient warmth for the hall, but the air had a musty smell to it. There were a few children's paintings on the wall, together with some large silhouettes of figures dancing. Some crepe paper streamers, left over from Christmas/New Year celebrations hung from the ceiling. Equipment used during the session was set up in the main room, which was furnished with wooden benches and trestle chairs around the walls and small tables and chairs for the children. A kitchen, and a toilet area, adjoined the main room.

Inside at the Papanui venue

The outdoor area was oblong and small in comparison with some of the facilities available to other groups. It was completely fenced and had a sand-pit, but no other permanent play equipment.

The Session

Inside the hall, the dough table, dressing up clothes, books, board puzzles, collage table, library box, easel, paper and paints, and tape recorder with music had been set up. Once everything had been set out, the atmosphere was pleasant and friendly. Outside, the box of metal farm vehicles, digging tools and containers were put out for play in the sandpit. As well, finger painting was set out on a table, as was a large basin containing warm, soapy water, a water funnel, and various differently- shaped and sized containers.

The children participated in the different activities on a free-play basis, usually working or playing in small groups. Everybody had a turn at finger painting which they obviously enjoyed; the sandpit was also the centre of much activity. For afternoon tea there was juice and pieces of apple for the children and tea and delicious home-baked cake for the adults. (As for the Taoroa group, the food provided for the adults' tea-break seemed to be an important and integral part of what the parents clearly viewed as a social occasion for themselves.) A sing-along and book reading period followed this, taking the group to the end of the morning. Most children, with their parents' help, selected a library book to take home for the week before going on their way.

Finger painting at Papanui

Parents

There were eight parents present for the whole session, including one whose youngest child had recently started school but who, as a mother, had been involved with the mobile in the area for 10 years and wished to maintain her contact, and another woman who was a nanny rather than a parent.

As soon as the parents arrived at the session, a cup of tea was made and a number of the mothers stayed in the kitchen chatting. For the remainder of the session, several parents remained in the kitchen talking, just checking briefly on their children from time to time. Two or three parents, however, rather than chatting with the others, mainly worked with the children.

Discussion amongst parents centred around the fund-raising fashion parade (tickets were handed out to committee members to sell) and the Hepatitis B injections which some children had already received that morning and some were to get that afternoon. There was a lot of personal discussion amongst the parents, particularly regarding their children. This was obviously a social time for these parents; they were, however, also interested in the study and asked a lot of questions whenever the researchers came near them! (The head teacher, in her Teacher Diary, rated parent participation during sessions at Papanui as "not very successful" and stated that: "[most] parents at this group rarely interact with children. They see the two hours as 'time out' from children.")

MATAROA: THURSDAY MORNING, 24 MARCH 1988

Location and Facilities

Mataroa is a small community just north of Taihape, or 60 kilometres from Hunterville. The teachers left Hunterville shortly after 8.30am, arriving at the Mataroa group's venue around 9am.

The group met in the Mataroa community hall, a large, old wooden building. The mobile pre-school group, however, only used the relatively small room adjacent to the main area of the hall which normally served as the supper room. It had an adjoining kitchen. Although this room was better lit and easier to heat than the main hall, there was not a lot of room and nowhere specific for adults to sit. There were no displays of children's art work or posters on the walls; the floor was wooden. Tables, chairs, and painting easel, used by the mobile pre-school group, were able to be stored in a corner of the main hall between sessions.

Outside, there was a small area, spread with wood-chips, for outdoor play. This was cordoned off during sessions with a portable wire fence. The play area included a sandpit. From the outdoor area the outlook incorporated paddocks, hills, and a variety of trees, including willows and pines.

Unpacking the van at the Mataroa Community Hall

The Session

Fourteen children were present, only one of whom was not yet old enough to be enrolled. This was a baby who spent much of its time on one teacher's lap while she read to, and worked on puzzles with, older children. Five children were Maori, and the rest pakeha.

Even though the weather was excellent, most activities were set up in the hall and the majority of children elected to stay inside to work. (This was a change in the normal pattern for this group; the teachers commented that these children were usually keen to stay outside.) The equipment inside consisted of books, the library box, puzzles, dough, paints, paper and easel, and the collage table. (Tape-recorded music played in the background.) Outside, there was, as usual, the box of tools and other items for use in the sandpit; there was also a carpentry bench with tools, wood, nails, and vice (the woodwork equipment available to this group was more extensive than that available to the other Hunterville mobile unit groups), and a portable swing/slide, although the latter was not used on this occasion. (Both the carpentry bench and tools and the portable slide/swing belonged to the group and were stored in the hall.)

Children engaged in free play at the different activities. The teachers moved between small groups of children and spent time working with individual children. The woodwork bench was monopolised by the boys, and two or three spent the whole session there (apart from when the group gathered for mat-times).

Morning tea for the children was held outside and they all sat together on a large piece of polythene with their lunch boxes full of eatables. (The quantity of food was extensive for a good many of the children and the teachers were kept busy helping them open bottles and packages.) The parents stayed inside the hall with their tea and biscuits, chatting together.

Once a rug had been put down in the hall for the children to sit on, one of the teachers organised a sing-along, followed by a dancing session; this was the final activity of the morning. Although it was very dark in the hall, nobody seemed to mind, and the children gave every evidence (for example, by singing and dancing enthusiastically, and smiling and laughing frequently) of enjoying this part of the session. (One of the parents also commented in the Parent Questionnaire that as well as the stories, this was the part of the session that she liked best about the mobile unit "... because that is [when] all the children join together and really enjoy themselves".)

Following mat-time, everyone, even the children, helped pack up the equipment but, although the children seemed to enjoy themselves, this part of the session was still a burden for teachers and parents. One mother stated in the Parent Questionnaire:

> ***"The unpacking of the van and the clean-up [are the aspects of the session that I like the least]. There are a few who do a lot and some who do very little. I am at present pregnant and unwell, so feel uneasy about the increased workload on others."***

The families which attended this session, many working on farms in more isolated rural areas, seemed to be different in many ways from families attending some of the other groups served by the mobile unit. Such differences were, according to the teachers, reflected in the relaxed, cheerful nature of the pre-school sessions, the practical, down-to-earth, and speedy way in which most people helped set up and pack away equipment, and the participation by children in traditional 'boys' and 'girls' activities. There was usually also less emphasis - by parents - on 'passive' activities, and more on becoming involved in more physical pursuits; nobody seemed to worry about getting messy.

Painting at Mataroa

Morning tea at Mataroa

Parents

As the mothers at this group liked to arrive early to help unpack and get the session underway promptly, they had a key to the hall. Seven parents were present for the entire session and there were two who stayed for part of the session. All of the parents worked with the children for at least some of the time, although three in particular spent most of their time with the children. The parents all checked on their children at various intervals during the session. In addition, parents had some involvement in 'housekeeping tasks' with three helping set up, two organising the morning tea, and five or six helping pack up. Four of the parents were involved in both the housekeeping tasks and working with the children.

During the session, the parents who were not working with the children often sat and watched the children at play or interacted with each other and with the teachers. The atmosphere at the session was very relaxed, with a lot of talking and joking. Discussion between parents focused on the fashion parade, "Gumboot Day"[6], and other local events, the use of the hall, a community meeting held the previous night, health matters, and Easter. Only one mother joined in the sing-along, while the remainder waited in the other room, chatting. (Teachers' comments in their Teacher Diaries included the following: "Most enjoy a chat in the kitchen here but this suits us better as their children can do with 'being away from Mum'.")

In the Parent Questionnaire used for the study, one parent from the Mataroa group made the following comment which appeared to reflect the views of most of the Mataroa parents concerning their association with the Hunterville mobile pre-school unit:

> ***"It is nice to have pre-school teachers available to our children. They are people with different outlooks to those our children usually encounter. Often in rural areas children aren't allowed to develop any differently [from] the generations before."***

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[6] "Gumboot Day" is a fun day, organised by rural communities in some areas of the North Island of New Zealand to which people wear gumboots and events are organised which centre around gumboots (gumboot throwing competitions, running races in gumboots etc). Typically, people who attend "Gumboot Day" take a picnic; there are stalls selling foods and other goods, and people of all ages have the opportunity to get toether as a community to talk and enjoy themselves. ('Gumboots' affectionately symbolise down-to-earth, rural life in New Zealand.)

MOAWHANGO: THURSDAY AFTERNOON, 24 MARCH 1988

Location and Facilities

The Moawhango community lies east of Taihape, 68 kilometres from Hunterville. The Moawhango group was the furthest from Hunterville, but the roads were so much better than those to other more distant venues - such as Taoroa - that it actually took less time to drive there than to some of the other sessions.

The group met in the Moawhango community hall which consisted of one large main room containing two tables and chairs and with an adjoining kitchen. It was quite dark inside the hall. Black polythene was laid down to protect the floors and there was some carpet in one corner (the teachers used this area for books and puzzles). No posters or children's art work was displayed. Outside, there was an area of grass about the size of two typical classrooms that was fenced off and contained a single tree. There was a small sandpit in one corner, a jungle-gym, and some old car and tractor tyres.

The Moawhango Community Hall

The Session

Fifteen children attended the session, 10 over the age of three years and the rest younger. All but one of the under-three-year-olds (a baby) joined in with the other children or undertook activities according to his or her capabilities. (As was the case at their other groups, the teachers welcomed children not yet old enough to be enrolled but stressed that parents were to supervise these children, leaving them - the teachers - free to work with the older children.)

The weather was warm and still and there was a pleasantly relaxed atmosphere during the session despite an abundance of hovering sand-flies. Apart from the group sing-along at the end, the session mostly took place outside.

The children all took a turn at finger painting, which they seemed to enjoy (as did the teachers), and played in the sandpit and on the jungle-gym. Part-way through the session, the head teacher put a rug down on the ground outside and read stories to any child who chose to listen. Afternoon tea, from 2.35pm, was also held outside, with all the children sitting on the rug together. The session concluded with songs on the mat inside from 2.50pm to 3pm. Then everyone, including the children, helped with the final packing up, although the children generally took this opportunity to play chasing games and generally run around together.

Finger painting at Moawhango

With the teacher, Moawhango

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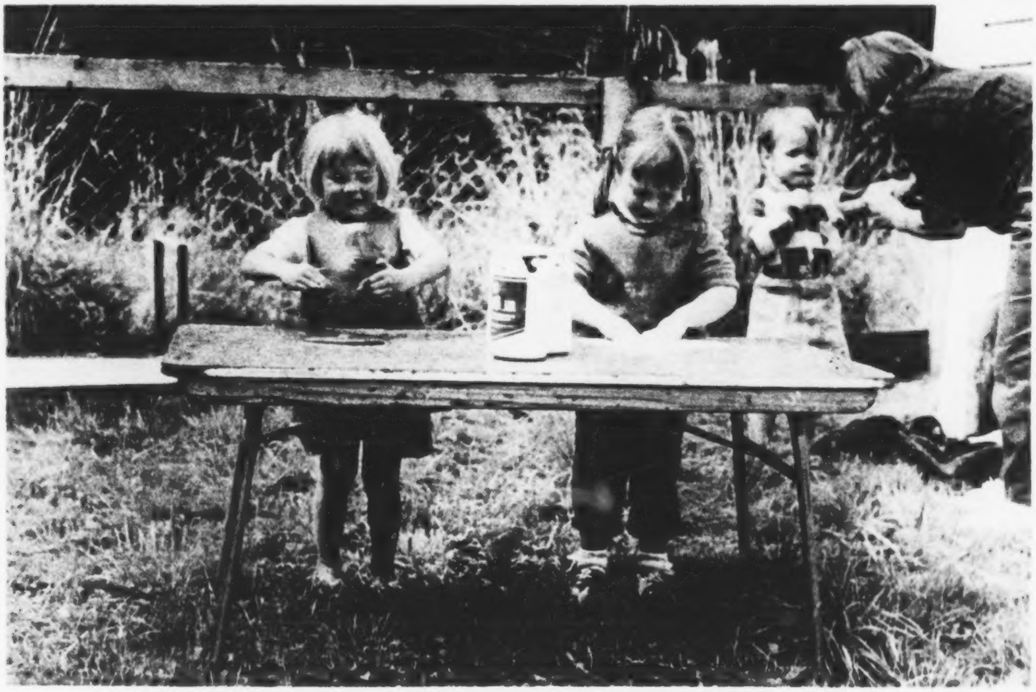

More finger painting at Moawhango

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The session in progress, Moawhango

Hunterville Mobile Pre-School Unit

Parents

There were five parents present for the duration of the session as well as a grandmother who came along to watch the proceedings. Two parents dropped their children off but did not stay, just returning to pick the children up again afterwards. There was usually only one parent working with the children at any given time; mostly parents just supervised their children in a very general way while continuing to chat together. One parent helped set up, two helped with afternoon tea, and six parents helped clean (including giving all the paint containers and brushes a thorough washing) and pack up at the end of the session. The parents talked amongst themselves, discussing the fund-raising fashion parade and the baking required for the group's stall on "Gumboot Day" and engaged in general conversation. Parents from the group stated in their Parent Questionnaires that they particularly enjoyed the opportunity to talk to other women. One parent said:

> ***"I think the aspect of meeting and mixing with other mums is great. I also like the idea of my daughter getting some pre-school education. Parents can... enjoy a second childhood... and the children benefit from seeing their parents involved as well."***

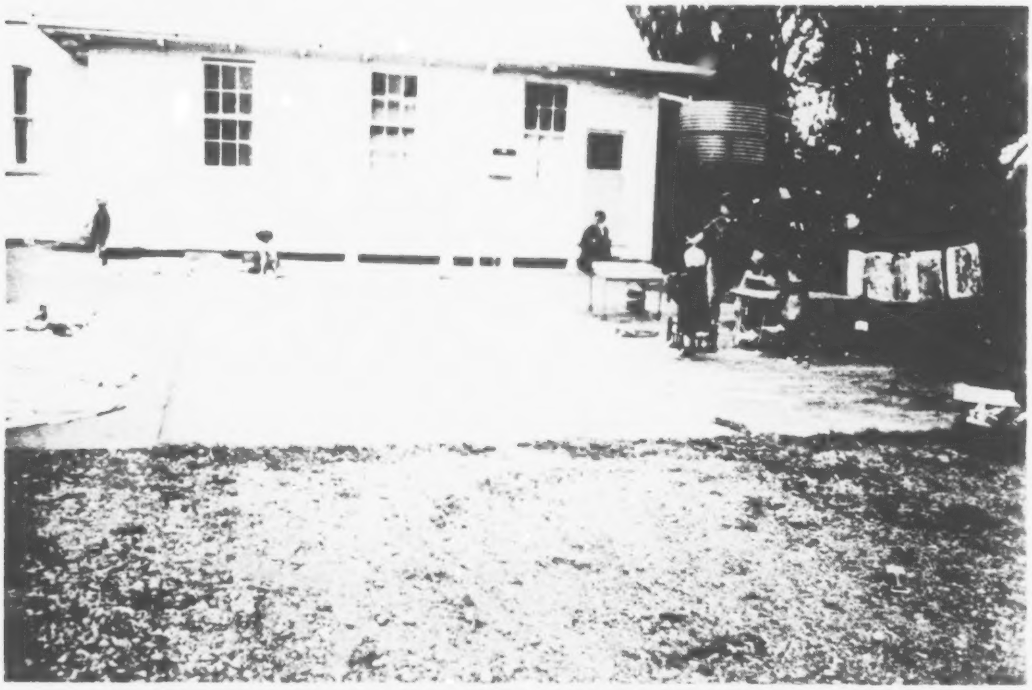
The parents at Moawhango also commented in their questionnaires that what they disliked most about the mobile unit was the low frequency of visits (one per week) and the travelling time necessary to attend these sessions. One parent stated:

> ***"[The session] seems so short and not often enough... Two and a half hours would make it more worth the long drive and twice a week would be better for the children... country children can be so isolated and so can their mothers."***

Another parent commented that, although she valued the services of the mobile unit, children living in remote areas should have even more opportunity to socialise not only with other country children but also with children living in nearby towns:

Hunterville Mobile Pre-School Unit

At the Hunterville Brownie Hall



> ***"The Hunterville unit has a wide area to cover. It's a pity we don't have a mobile unit covering the country areas of Taihape only. Long travelling for the teachers would be reduced. Also, if attached to the Taihape kindergarten, there would be more social contact with the town children. As it stands now, parents are only allowed to belong to one kindy... [but] the mobile unit has been an important move to bring country children together to socialise. The equipment available is vast and improving all the time. The quality of the teachers has been more than 100% in my view."*** **(She felt, however, that although** ***"In the past and present [the unit has been fortunate enough to get] teachers [who] have fitted in well in the country community, relating well with the parents and children... all kindergarten graduates should spend a period of time in the mobile kindy unit to experience the country children and the environment they live in as they are not as sophisticated as their counterparts in the city."*****)**

There were some parents, however, who commented that the distances that they had to travel would have made it less than practicable for them to attend a second session each week, even though - in theory - they would have liked to do so.

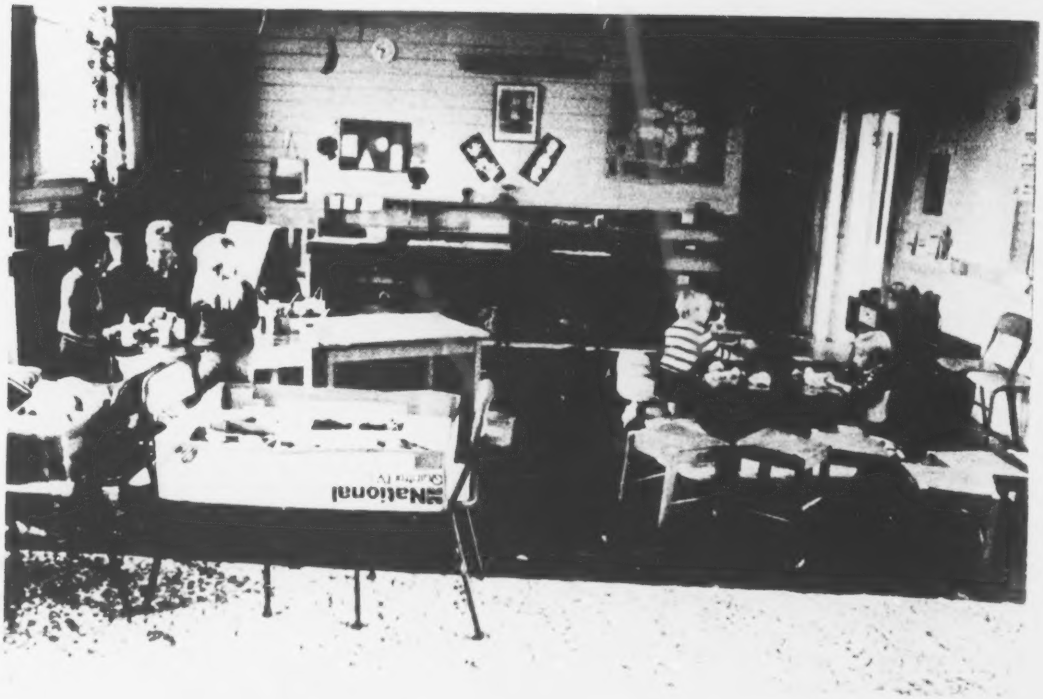
HUNTERVILLE: FRIDAY MORNING, 25 MARCH 1988

Location and Facilities

The final session for the week was held in the Hunterville Brownie Hall, and was the combination of the Ongo Road and Rata groups (the two groups nearest to Hunterville). This venue was only 0.5km from the mobile pre-school base at the Hunterville School in the township, and it meant that teachers had more time to work with the children, rather than spending time travelling to and from the venue. In the Teacher Diaries, both teachers rated the time they were able to spend with the children at this group as "very successful". One teacher commented that the three-hour session was "great" and that the presence of older children in the group was a bonus as they were more appreciative of the extra time allocated to this session.

The Brownie Hall was a small wooden building, with a main room about the size of a typical classroom. It had very large windows which provided ample natural light, but it was cold and poorly heated (there was only one heater, mounted on the wall, and another free-standing heater, available). Bench seats, tables, stools, a painting easel, and a 'clothesline' used to hang wet pictures on, all used during sessions, were stored at the hall. There were Brownie pictures and posters on the walls and a piano, chairs, and a bookcase in the hall. Where there

Hunterville Mobile Pre-School Unit



Indoor play at the Hunterville Brownie Hall

was no carpet on the floors, polythene was laid down. Adjoining the hall was a kitchen, about half the size of the hall, which had no pictures or art work, but included a carpeted area with a sofa and chairs. It was here that books and puzzles were set out during sessions.

The outdoor area was actually the car-park, and mainly consisted of concrete, gravel, and weeds, with a long drive leading up to it. The entire area was fenced off, with a child-proof gate at the road entrance.

The Session

This was the largest group of all those visited during the week, with 17 children (16 of enrolled age) attending. (If the numbers were to increase much above this level in the future, the teachers felt that they might then have to ask some parents to stay and help with supervision. However, for the present, they were happy to run this group more along the lines of a standard kindergarten ie with little or no parent assistance.)

The session began at 9am and ended at 12 noon. The dough table, collage materials, painting equipment, and a tape recorder playing tapes of children's songs were set up inside, while finger painting, the water trough and containers, wooden blocks, dressing up clothes, the box of sandpit tools and toys, and tricycles were made available outside in the concrete parking area.

The head teacher spent time with children at the finger painting table - an activity which appeared to be very popular with the children. There was also much creative activity at the collage table inside, with children producing many items out of cardboard boxes, glue, straws, buttons, and a variety of other materials. Children in general were very engrossed in all of the activities they attempted today and there was a high incidence of cooperative play evident, probably because the average age of the children was greater than that at many other groups.

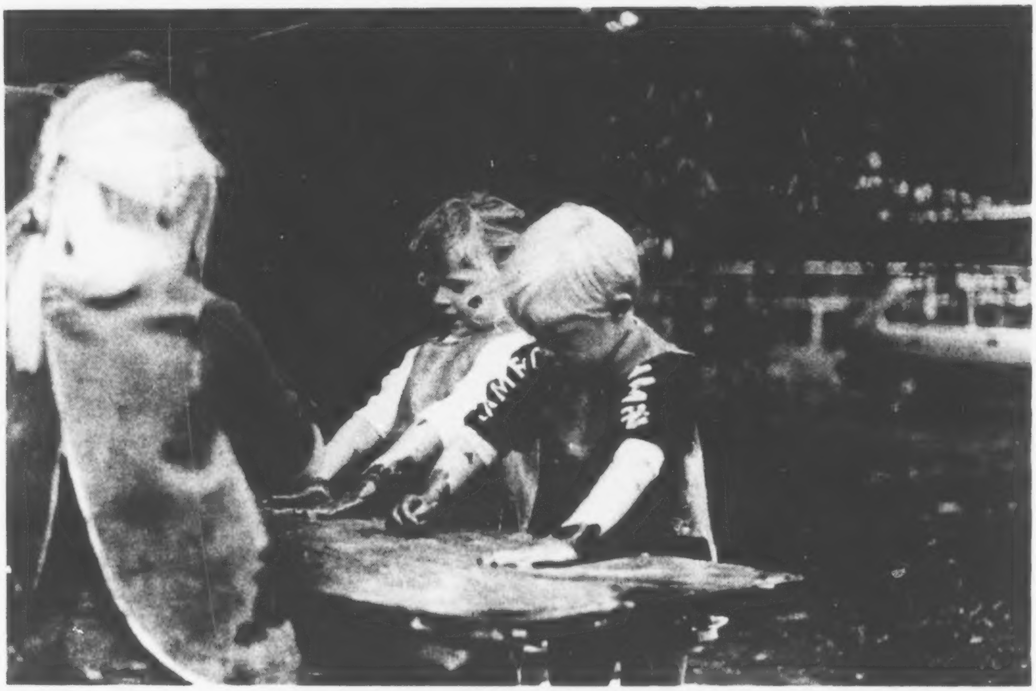
The teachers commented that they noticed that two or three children participated in activities at this session which they did not normally attempt - for example, one boy finger painted for the first time.

Finger painting outside the Hunterville Brownie Hall

After morning tea, the teacher took a group session in which she used figures stuck on a felt board to illustrate a story she was telling. Following this, everybody went for a walk to the Hunterville Primary School to explore a marquee erected in the school grounds in readiness for the weekend's rugby and hockey centennial. (The teachers often took the children from this group on small trips. In her Teacher Diary, completed in July 1988, the head teacher reported that she took a group of "near five [year old] children to the school to familiarise them with where they will attend and hopefully ease the transition from pre-school to primary school.") The Hunterville session ended when everyone returned to the Brownie Hall.

Parents

This session differed from the others in that, apart from the one on roster duty, parents were asked not to attend unless accompanying a child not yet old enough to be enrolled. Both teachers appreciated the opportunity to work with children on their own, as they found it distracting at times having many parents around; they also found the presence of parents inhibited some children from participating in certain activities. The teachers further noted in



Having a good time at the Hunterville group

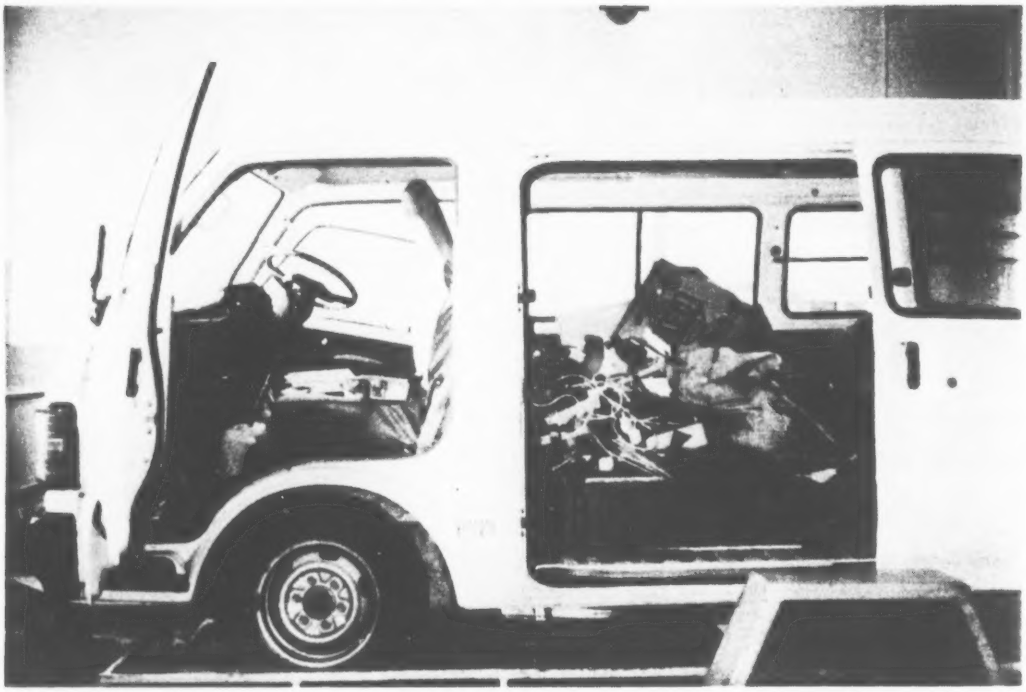
their Teacher Diaries that having a much smaller number of parents (sometimes none, other than the one on duty) at the session provided them with a chance to get to know the rostered parent better. The main role of parents at the Hunterville sessions, therefore, was simply to drop off and pick up their children, and borrow and return library books on behalf of their children.

For most of this session there were no parents present, not even a parent on roster duty. (The parent who was scheduled to help was unable to do so at the last minute, but the teachers felt able to cope on their own today.) One parent arrived at 11am with her two-and-a-half year old child and sat in on the teacher's mat session; another arrived at 11.05am but she made herself a cup of coffee and stayed in the kitchen and did not help pack up the equipment.

POSTSCRIPT

Some weeks after the fieldwork had been completed at the Hunterville mobile pre-school unit, it was learned that the unit's Ford Bedford van - complete with all the equipment stored inside it - had been stolen and crashed. This proved to be very upsetting, and extremely inconvenient, for everyone involved with the unit.

The Department of Education provided the teachers with an old van until a proper replacement could be arranged. However, as the temporary substitute van was not equipped with the proper storage shelves and containers this made unloading and packing the van very tedious and difficult. As well, the van lacked a passenger seat and so the teacher who was not driving had to sit in the back with the equipment. This was very uncomfortable for the teacher unlucky enough to be the passenger, especially on trips to more distant venues over rough roads. One teacher commented in her Teacher Diary, completed during the period of waiting to receive a new van, that the worst thing about the day's work was: "Bouncing back to base in the back seat of a horrible rattley van. This road is unsealed." Not being able to sit together also had other implications: normally, the teachers were able to spend much of their travelling time discussing sessions, their programme, and plans for working with individual children. This was difficult, if not impossible, in these circumstances. The teachers coped well with the added difficulties that the loss of their van and equipment brought them - further evidence of the adaptability of mobile pre-school unit teachers generally - but were very pleased when their van and equipment were replaced some weeks later.



The result of the mobile unit's van being stolen and crashed
(photos supplied by the teachers)

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Hunterville Mobile Pre-School Unit

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The van supplied by the Department of Education as a temporary replacement

'Storage facilities' in the temporary replacement vehicle

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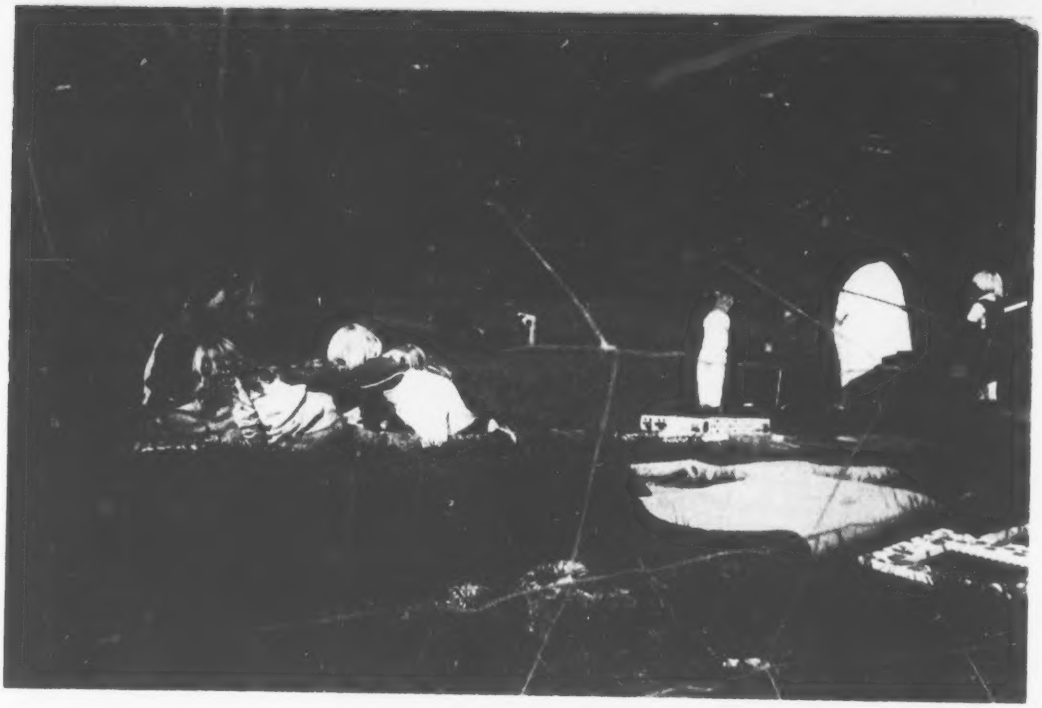

THE MARLBOROUGH MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT, BLENHEIM

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THE MARLBOROUGH MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT, BLENHEIM

Introduction

The Marlborough mobile pre-school unit, once referred to as the 'Pelorus mobile pre-school unit'[1], commenced operations on 1 April 1976. The mobile unit was for several months staffed by only one kindergarten teacher. By late 1976, however, the demands of the job necessitated employing a second teacher on a part-time basis and, in the following year, increasing the hours of the second teacher to that of a full-time position. The mobile unit was originally based at Havelock (at the time the fieldwork was carried out, however, the mobile unit's base had been firmly established at Blenheim for some years) and the first teacher began by servicing four groups - at Okaramio, Canvastown, Linkwater, and Rai Valley - visiting all but one of the groups twice-weekly. Until a new Ford Transit van purchased especially for the mobile unit and fitted with shelves and compartments for the efficient transportation of equipment and materials became available, the first teacher had to make do with an old Ford Thames van. This was a former school bus which had been roughly adapted to its new purpose by having the passenger seats removed to make way for the mobile unit's belongings.

As discussed in Chapter 1 of Volume 1 of this report, the Marlborough mobile pre-school unit was considered to be a model for possible future mobile pre-school units in rural New Zealand - ie it was established on a trial basis as an attempt to meet the needs of some of New Zealand's rural pre-school children who would otherwise have no access to pre-school education. In October 1975, the former Department of Education prepared the following statement for The Marlborough Express, Blenheim:

'MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT FOR MARLBOROUGH

> **As announced earlier by the Government, Marlborough has been selected for trial of New Zealand's first rural mobile unit for pre-school education. It is proposed that the unit serve the Pelorus district, encompassing the Kaituna, Linkwater, Pelorus and Rai valleys, although extension to other areas in Marlborough may be possible.**

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[1] Department of Education files do not record when and why the name was changed to the Marlborough mobile pre-school unit.

Mobile units for pre-school education are used in rural areas of some other countries, such as Australia, but this would be the first in New Zealand. Mobile units employing kindergarten teachers are, however, operated in Wellington by the Crippled Children's Society, and by the YWCA in conjunction with the Lower Hutt Kindergarten Association.

The unit for Marlborough results from Government policy to provide more assistance for pre-school education in rural areas where establishment of the usual pre-school services may not be possible. To this end, Government approval has also been given to the provision of pre-school education programmes through the Correspondence School, whereby parents in isolated areas such as in many parts of the Marlborough Sounds, will be provided with materials and guidance for educational activities for their pre-school children. This, also, is scheduled to begin during 1976.

In approving these schemes the Government is following its policy of giving emphasis to the early stages of education and is carrying out the recommendations of the Committee of Inquiry into Pre-School Education, 1971 (the 'Hill Report') and the Advisory Council on Educational Priorities (Educational Development Conference) which, in its 1974 report, asked "that special provision be made for children living in the more remote areas, by strengthening the pre-school advisory services, by means of correspondence, radio and television programmes and through mobile pre-school units".

Since the initial announcement of the mobile pre-school unit scheme for Marlborough, the Department of Education has formally recognised for financial support a playcentre that has become established at Havelock but it is intended that the mobile unit should support and extend, not supplant, such local developments. Its main function is seen as assisting local play groups and stimulating local initiative for the establishment of other such groups.

A van, supplied and maintained by the Department of Education and driven by a trained pre-school teacher, is to travel to rural centres such as Rai Valley township, on a regular itinerary. It would carry the necessary portable equipment and material.

> **Factors which have influenced the choice of the Pelorus district include the initiative already shown by parents in establishing play groups, lack of state-assisted pre-school services in the area, and a reasonably high concentration of population along the arterial valley roads.'**

Prior to the commencement of the mobile unit, meetings organised by Department of Education staff, local kindergarten association staff, and others were held to inform groups of parents in the Pelorus district of the purpose and objectives of the proposed unit and to inform them of what their role as parents was likely to be.

Department of Education files record the following:

> **'... when the parent groups were met in October a number of points about the mobile unit scheme were covered at each meeting. The people were informed that the first van would be temporary until arrival of the new one, now expected to be built later this year [1976]. Each group of parents was asked to appoint a convener to act as contact person and be responsible for local arrangements. The provision of suitable heavy and fixed equipment such as sandpits at each hall or school venue was to be one of the responsibilities of the parents. They were informed too that they would be expected to attend sessions in good numbers and to assist the new teacher in ways she would indicate. It was stated that the unit would be designated a kindergarten (albeit an extraordinary one) within the Blenheim Association for administration. The Association was to receive the standard administration grant of $120 for the unit and sessional allowances would be payable to defray some of the unit's on-location expenses.'**

The three-year trial period revealed that the Marlborough mobile pre-school unit appeared to be working well. The government at the time therefore gave the go-ahead for other units to be established. (As shown elsewhere in this report, several new units commenced duties in 1979/80.)

Marlborough Mobile Pre-School Unit

Although the prototype for rural mobile pre-school units in New Zealand was found to be basically successful, departmental files also show that there have been problems over the years. These seemed mainly to do with deciding upon itinerary changes. Information on file suggests that, at times, it was difficult to reach a consensus of opinion between parents, teachers, local kindergaten association staff, the District Officer - Early Childhood Education, and, ultimately, the Department of Education. There have also been periods in the mobile unit's history when there were staffing problems, with teachers and groups of parents not getting on well and/or a constant series of relieving teachers, situations not conducive to a well-planned and well-run programme. At the time the fieldwork was carried out, however, the mobile unit appeared to be very stable and running smoothly.

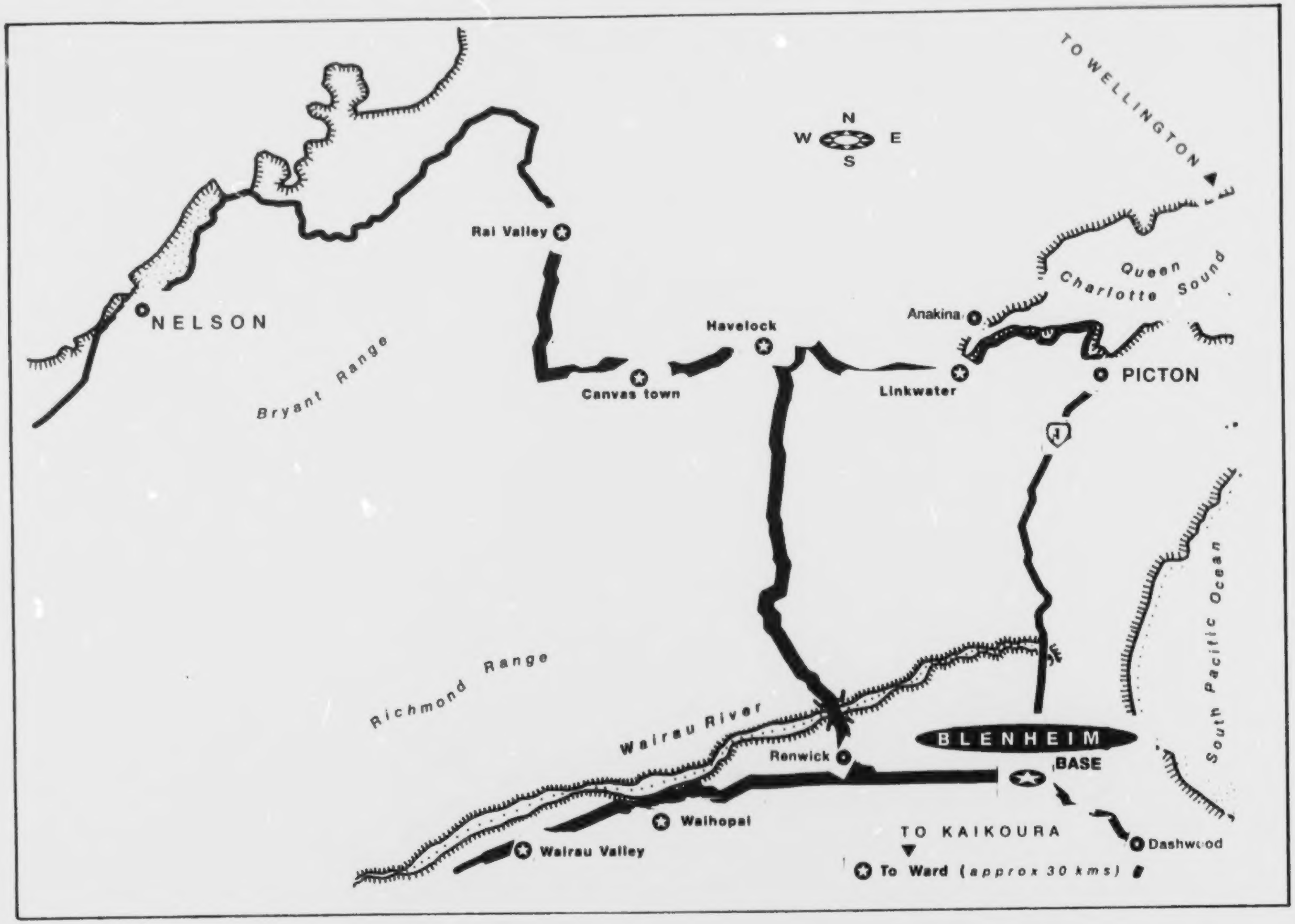
The Itinerary of the Marlborough Mobile Pre-School Unit

At the time the fieldwork was carried out (27 April to 3 May 1988) the teachers on the Marlborough mobile pre-school unit were visiting seven different groups, travelling a total distance of around 590 kilometres per week (Table 7.1). The map opposite shows the location of the seven groups on the itinerary. As may be noted from Table 7.1, three of the groups - Canvastown, Linkwater, and Rai Valley - were ones which had been visited by the mobile unit since it commenced its services in 1976. The Havelock group met twice a week while the other six groups each received one session per week.

Length of Sessions and Time Taken to Unpack and Repack Equipment

As shown in Table 7.2, sessions held by the Marlborough mobile pre-school unit were an average of two hours long. (These seemed to be somewhat shorter hours than had been the case earlier in the unit's history; for example, the morning session at Ward had once started at 9.15am and ended at 11.45am, giving a total of $2^1/_2$ hours. The change in hours appears to have been due to the increased time needed each week to travel to the greater number of venues visited in 1988.) Unpacking equipment from the van and setting it up generally took between five and 15 minutes (Table 7.3), depending on the venue, the weather, and the nature and range of activities being used on a particular day. Although unpacking was not always complete by the time a session was officially underway, this did not disrupt or hinder proceedings as the children were always able - and eager - to play with their peers and/or to take part in whatever activities were available as soon as they arrived. Because of parental help throughout the session (eg while mat-time was being held, parents tidied up, cleaned table tops, and carried equipment out to the van ready for loading), the teachers were usually able to complete repacking of the van after the session ended in five to eight minutes, before leaving to go on to the next session or to return to Blenheim.

Marlborough Mobile Pre-School Unit


TO WELLINGTON
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Bryant Range
Havelock
Canvas town
Anakina
Queen Charlotte Sound
Linkwater
PICTON
1
South Pacific Ocean
Richmond Range
Wairau River
Renwick
BLENHEIM
BASE
Waihopai
Wairau Valley
TO KAIKOURA
Dashwood
To Ward (approx 30 kms)

Scale 2cm = 5 kilometres

Table 7.1: Approximate distances travelled per week and the time spent travelling by the Marlborough mobile pre-school unit teachers

	Base to morning destination			Morning destination to afternoon destination			Afternoon destination to Blenheim (ie Telecom yard where van was garaged)		Total kilometres per day	Total travelling time per day (mins)
	Morning destination	Distance travelled (kilometres)	Travelling time (mins)	Afternoon destination	Distance travelled (kilometres)	Travelling time (mins)	Distance travelled (kilometres)	Travelling time (mins)		
Monday	Linkwater	56	45	Havelock	14	15	45	35	115	95
Tuesday	Wairau Valley	41	30	Waihopai Valley	54	35	34	20	129	85
Wednesday	Havelock	45	35	Base (office)	45	35	6	5	96	75
Thursday	Rai Valley	71	55	Canvastown	18	15	54	35	143	105
Friday	Ward	50	50	Base (office)	50	50	6	5	106	105
								Weekly totals	589 kilometres	465 minutes (7 hrs 45 mins)

Table 7.2: Length of sessions and times sessions began and ended during the fieldwork period at the Marlborough mobile pre-school unit

Name of group/time	Time session began	Time session ended	Length of session[a]
Linkwater (Monday am)	9.30am	11.45am	2hrs 15mins
Havelock (Monday pm)	1.05pm	2.45pm	1hr 40mins
Wairau Valley (Tuesday am)	9.30am	11.40am	2hrs 10mins
Waihopai Valley (Tuesday pm)	1.15pm	3.00pm	1hr 45mins
Havelock (Wednesday am)	9.30am	11.32am	2hrs 2mins
Rai Valley (Thursday am)	9.40am	11.43am	2hrs 3mins
Canvastown (Thursday pm)	1.03pm	3.00pm	1hr 57mins
Ward (Friday am)	9.35am	11.37am	2hrs 2mins

a Not including time taken to unpack and repack equipment before and after sessions began and ended.

Table 7.3: Time (in minutes) taken to unpack and pack up at each session during the fieldwork period

Name of group	Time taken to unpack and set up session[a b]	Time taken to pack up etc[c]
Linkwater	5 mins	5 mins
Havelock	5 mins	8 mins
Wairau Valley	5 mins	5 mins
Waihopai Valley	10 mins	8 mins
Havelock	15 mins	5 mins
Rai Valley	25 mins	8 mins
Canvastown	5 mins	5 mins
Ward	5 mins	5 mins

a Includes time spent by teachers before and shortly after sessions began. Unpacking completed after the beginning of a session did not interrupt the flow of activities.

b Parents had usually opened the hall (etc) before the teachers arrival and had completed a good deal of the setting up process; they also supervised their children, already at play.

c Does not include preliminary packing during session time; this was largely completed by parents and did not interrupt the flow of activities.

Characteristics of the Communities Served by the Marlborough Mobile Pre-School Unit

When they were asked during their interviews to 'describe the community (communities) that you serve' one of the Marlborough mobile pre-school unit teachers made the following comments:

> ***"There is a big mixture of all sorts at our different groups. There is not so much of a cultural [ie Maori/pakeha etc] mix in Ward except that there are farm owners and farm workers out there and that is a type of cultural mix. There is an unemployment problem in Havelock. It can be quite a depressing place, Havelock - besides fishing, there isn't a lot for people to do. The employment situation out there has probably been like that for a long time. The lifestyle is also pretty erratic for a lot of them, being based on fishing. Some of the boats go out at 4am and they might come home at 10am. The fathers might see their kids for an hour and then they are off on the boat again so it's pretty erratic. There isn't a great deal of work round Canvastown [either]. The rural downturn has depressed the area quite considerably.***
>
> ***The type of paid employment of families on the mobile unit varies, each community is unique. For instance, out at Linkwater most families [who come to sessions] are employed by the Outward Bound School [at Anakiwa] and are fairly transient while the rest are farmers - except for a few people who have moved there because they just enjoy the sort of lifestyle that goes with living way out in the country with few commodities.***
>
> ***Some of the families who attend sessions have to travel 20 minutes to half an hour before they actually get to the sessions so they are really keen [for their children to have access to pre-school education]. And some of the communities have a really good cross-section of people who interact really well while others have not only cultural mixes but religious mixes and things like that which sometimes results in different groups not getting on very well. (Division amongst parents - mainly because of different religious views - was a problem at one of our groups earlier on so we had to work hard to get a sense of group unity.)"***

The other teacher also gave her perceptions of the communities which the unit was catering for at the time the fieldwork was carried out:

> ***"Linkwater, I would describe as middle-class with the majority in employment. Not really a cultural mix there, it is pretty much European. Havelock has a mix of Maori and European, with the majority [of those connected with the mobile unit] in***

> ***employment although there is a small group who are unemployed. Types of paid employment? Well, Linkwater is mostly Outward Bound or farming, Havelock is marine people like mussel farmers although there is a bit of a mix - business people, ordinary farmers, as well as mussel farming and fishing. Wairau Valley is just about totally and utterly dairy farming and again middle-class - I'd almost go as far as to say upper-class because there are some quite well off people - and European. Waihopai Valley is sheep farmers, all sheep farmers except three families who are farm labourers as opposed to land owners and again, families are middle-class European. Rai Valley has dairy farmers, business people, some unemployed; there's a cultural mix there. Some Rai Valley families are also farm labourers and others work for the forestry - that's another big area out at Rai Valley. Canvastown families are all farmers, the whole lot. And Ward is either farming or fishing, nothing else."***

Neither teacher felt there were any particular events or characteristics associated with the communities that they served which disrupted the sessions they ran in any major way. (The only exception was when there were events - such as 'Pet Day' - at local primary schools which could mean that parents and pre-schoolers went to the school instead of attending sessions. On these occasions, if roll numbers were seriously affected, the teachers - and any parents and children not already at the school - would go along to the event as well.) Parents involved in shearing or other seasonal farming activities usually managed to arrange to have their children brought to sessions by someone else if they could not attend themselves and roll numbers were therefore seldom affected.

Specific Needs of Communities Served by the Marlborough Mobile Pre-School Unit

The teachers were asked during the interviews whether they thought that any of the communities they served had 'specific needs' which affected the way in which they worked with the children and parents. In answer to this question, one of the teachers commented as follows:

> ***"While the groups don't have specific language difficulties, I think that what we have to do is just give the basics to the children because in some respects they are deprived really - they have different experiences from children in the towns so I suppose we take the 'town experiences' to the country areas. We also try and capitalise as far as language usage and the activities that we do on the sorts of things that happen on the farms - like we will do breadmaking and talk about making butter and how wheat grows (things that they see happening around them but no***

> ***one thinks to explain to them). So children - and parents - from the different communities do have specific needs in that they need the experiences of kindergarten."***

The other teacher also commented:

> ***"All the communities have a specific need in that the people are just dying for socialisation [ie the opportunity to meet with others], both adults and children alike. I can't think of any of our families, out of about 100 families, who really have a lot of opportunity to meet socially with others. So that is a definite, specific need and we try hard to fulfil that need."***

Further perceptions, expressed by the teachers during the course of the observation week, of the needs of the groups that they visited are discussed in the following sections on children and parents associated with the Marlborough mobile pre-school unit.

The Children

The teachers were quite happy for parents to bring their toddlers and babies along with them to sessions. They felt it was entirely appropriate to the philosophy and aims of the mobile pre-school unit to allow all who wished to attend sessions to do so (including visitors to the area who brought their pre-schoolers along on a casual basis). For this reason, the teachers did not feel that the concept of a formal waiting list was relevant for the Marlborough mobile pre-school unit. Although having a wide age range present within a given session made their work more difficult, the teachers enjoyed having the little children around as much as the older children and did not mind the challenge involved in trying to cater for all age groups.

The teachers further stated that they were 'totally flexible' about their rolls - ie they were very happy for any parents willing or able to take their children to more than one of the groups which they visited during the week to do so. Tables 7.4 and 7.5 show the number of children who were present at sessions during the fieldwork period and at sessions held at each group some weeks later.

Table 7.4: Number of children present at each session held by the Marlborough mobile pre-school unit during the fieldwork period

Name of group/time	Number of enrolled children[a] present	Number of non-enrolled children present	Total number present
Linkwater (Monday am)	8	4	12
Havelock (Monday pm)	7	4	11
Wairau Valley (Tuesday am)	16	6	22
Waihopai Valley (Tuesday pm)	6	2	8
Havelock (Wednesday am)	13	2	15
Rai Valley (Thursday am)	15	6	21
Canvastown (Thursday pm)	4	2	6
Ward (Friday am)	12	1	13

[a] Children aged 3 years up to 5 years.

Table 7.5: Number of children present (as reported by teachers) at Marlborough mobile pre-school unit sessions held on 27 and 28 June and 13 to 15 July, 1988

Name of group	Number of enrolled children present	Number of non-enrolled children present	Total number present
Linkwater[a]	3	6	9
Havelock	6	3	9
Wairau Valley	16	7	23
Waihopai Valley	8	3	11
Havelock	12	4	16
Rai Valley	12	10	22
Canvastown[b]	5	2	7
Ward	10	10	20

[a] The head teacher noted that at this session there were: "More under-threes than kindergarten-aged children. Some of our bigger, older children absent [today] which affects the session."

[b] This group appeared to have gained extra children since the fieldwork period. At that time, there were only four regular attenders.

The Teachers' Philosophy for Working with the Children

When asked during the interview what her philosophy was for working with children attending mobile pre-school unit sessions, the head teacher from the Marlborough mobile unit had this to say:

> ***"I try to develop independence in children and the ability to explore - if they can't investigate, explore in an atmosphere that is created especially for that then I don't see that they will ever learn that at school. To me, it is really, really important that I provide an environment which is stimulating and interesting enough to encourage the children to actually explore how far they can go and where what they do is their own work. I really believe, especially on the mobile unit, that children be given the opportunity to explore. Lots of parents don't like children exploring but I believe that children learn if they are doing things themselves - they don't learn anything by being made to cut around a particular shape that a teacher or parent has given them but will learn about a shape by being able to draw their own. So that is my personal philosophy, in fact it is really important to me."***

The other teacher, too, expressed her philosophy for working with children attending mobile unit sessions:

> ***"For me, language is the basis of my philosophy for working with children - developing the various ways that you can achieve optimum language skills. Parallel to that would be socialisation skills because I believe that a lot of the children on the mobile are isolated so that even merely having the opportunity to play with and be around other children is a big plus for them. But if they can't communicate effectively, then you have a barrier so language and social skills go hand in hand really."***

Aspects of the Teachers' Work with Children During Sessions and Philosophy behind the Programme that They Ran

Both teachers were very much in favour of taking their groups on as many outings as they could as a way of broadening the children's experience. Although their local kindergarten association did not always approve, the teachers liked to be able to make spontaneous decisions about whether or not to go on an outing, for example, during the fieldwork period the teachers were all set to take their smallest group to watch a silversmith at work, only deciding against it when one of the parents advised them it was a much longer trip than they had thought. Because they did not hire a bus or go on public transport (instead, the children went in their parents' cars - just as they did when riding to and from sessions) and as there was always a very favourable ratio of adults to children on any such occasion, the teachers felt that it was not essential to have to let the kindergarten association know beforehand about informal outings.

As a further way of broadening children's experiences, the teachers also organised at least one event every term which allowed parents and children from two or more of their groups to get together. Shortly before the fieldwork period, for example, there had been a highly successful Teddy Bears' picnic held for children and parents of the Havelock, Linkwater, Rai Valley and Canvastown groups and another for the Ward, Wairau and Waihopai Valley groups. These were reported to be enjoyable social occasions for all concerned and gave an opportunity for people to mix with others outside their immediate communities. (The Blenheim newspaper covered the events, publishing a short article, together with some photographs.)

While their emphasis during sessions was on free play in order to allow children a chance to explore activities of their own choosing, the teachers also usually followed a general theme for sessions held over the course of a week (in the case of the Havelock group, which met twice weekly, either two separate themes were necessary each week or the second session was organised to build on what had occurred at the first session), and featured at least one special activity to reflect that theme. All children, aged three or more (ie those old enough to be officially enrolled) were then actively encouraged to take part in the special activity during the session. (This also helped to satisfy the parents who liked their children to produce tangible evidence of time spent at kindergarten.) The teachers pointed out, however, that they had to be very flexible with regards planned theme activities because of the constantly shifting nature of the groups. For instance, one week there may be mainly children at the upper end of the age range present at a session while the following week there may be a predominance of very young children present for whom the planned theme activity would be unsuitable. The teachers stated that they therefore had to be able to adapt quickly to the age range they were catering for at each particular session.

The teachers gave out 'homework' scrapbooks to all children over the age of three years who wanted them. In these books the teachers wrote suggestions for tasks and activities that children could do at home with their parents. As well as helping to bridge for children the week-long gap between sessions, the teachers felt that these were a gentle and subtle way of encouraging parents to become involved in their children's learning.

During tidy-up time at each session the teachers liked to involve the children as much as possible. During the tidying and packing process the teachers explained to the children how they should go about the tasks they had been assigned; for example, how to put lids back onto containers, how to carry things so that they would not get damaged, and how to pack things into their containers in the most efficient way.

As well as planning their programme to maximise children's language, social, and other learning opportunities and experiences, the teachers were interested in the well-being of the children in their care in other ways also. For instance, the teachers stated that they liked to encourage 'healthy eating' and had gradually been successful in getting parents to provide fruit - or in the case of two groups, either sandwiches or crackers and cheese - for the children's morning or afternoon tea instead of biscuits or 'junk food'. (Biscuits and cakes were, however, acceptable on special occasions such as a birthday 'shout' or on occasions such as the recently held 'Teddy Bears' Picnic' for which one of the teachers made a cake in the shape of a teddy bear for the group to share.) The teachers felt that their philosophy of 'healthy eating' at sessions not only had a direct benefit for children at sessions but was an informal and non-threatening way of alerting parents to good nutrition.

Parents Associated with the Marlborough Mobile Pre-School Unit

The teachers stressed how important they thought it was to establish and maintain contact with parents. They stated that, if it were not for time constraints, they would have liked to spend even more time with parents than they already did as they felt that would have positive outcomes not only for the parents but for the children as well. Both teachers were therefore very happy for parents to remain during sessions - they enjoyed having them there - and to take part in activities in any way that they (the parents) felt happy with. The teachers made every attempt to establish a good rapport with parents and frequently chatted to them on a wide range of topics. Table 7.6 shows the number of parents who were present at sessions observed during the fieldwork period, while Table 7.7 shows how many parents - as reported by the teachers - were present at sessions some weeks later.

Marlborough Mobile Pre-School Unit

Table 7.6: Number of parents present at each session held by the Marlborough mobile pre-school unit during the fieldwork period

Name of group	Number of parents present all or most of session	Number of parents present for part of session	Total number of parents present[a]
Linkwater	7	1	8
Havelock	8	-	8
Wairau Valley	10	1	11
Waihopai Valley	4	1	5
Havelock	7	-	7
Rai Valley	10	1	11
Canvastown	2	3	5
Ward	5	3	8

[a] This group refers not only to parents who had some input into the session during their stay (eg by working with the children and carrying out housekeeping tasks) but to those who may simply have observed or spent their time chatting to other parents and/or the teachers. (It does not refer to those who stayed just long enough to drop off or collect their children.)

Table 7.7: Number of parents present (as reported by teachers) at sessions held on 27 and 28 June and 13 to 15 July, 1988

Name of group/time	Number of parents present
Linkwater (Monday am, 27/6/88)	7
Havelock (Monday pm)	6
Wairau Valley (Tuesday am)	13
Waihopai Valley (Tuesday pm)	6
Havelock (Wednesday am, 13/7/88)	9
Rai Valley (Thursday am, 14/7/88)	19
Canvastown (Thursday pm)	2
Ward (Friday am, 15/7/88)	8

As well as enjoying the sense of parents being involved during sessions, the teachers pointed out that, in any case, it was a necessity for many of the parents to remain, as they not infrequently had to drive a considerable distance to bring their children to venues and it was just not feasible for them to go anywhere else to wait until the session ended.

Besides the benefits which they saw from parents being able to meet and talk socially, the teachers felt that another very important reason for parents to remain throughout sessions was to give them a chance to talk with others about any problems or concerns they might have about their children (or other matters). The teachers were very conscious that parenting is not an automatic, straightforward matter for all parents and that, especially in more isolated areas such as the ones the mobile unit served, it is too easy for young parents to feel very much on their own. (The head teacher quoted an instance of one young mother in the district in need of support: she had not even known that she would have to get up during the night to feed her new baby.) For this reason the teachers liked to think that by welcoming parents at sessions, parents would feel free to ask them, or other parents, about anything they would like to know. The teachers also tried to liaise with speech therapists and local public health and plunket nurses as often as possible, arranging for them to visit sessions, and/or to show videos (usually in nearby primary schools while sessions were underway) to groups of parents on parenting skills and health-related topics. Finally, the teachers also encouraged (but did not expect) parents to work with the children during sessions as a way of developing confidence in interacting with children; also, simply being able to observe the session in progress was seen to be valuable for parents as well.

The teachers tried to visit parents in their homes as much as possible - they regularly fitted in a lunch-time visit between sessions - because they felt it provided them with an important insight into the children's backgrounds and into the communities which they were serving as a whole. While they knew generally about the types of employment their families were involved in, the teachers stated that, because they did not live locally, it was not always easy to keep up with other aspects of people's lives.

The Role of Parents During Sessions and their Contributions to the Overall Running of the Mobile Unit

Parents associated with each venue were responsible for carrying out maintenance work on equipment (eg sandpits and other outdoor equipment) which remained at the venue. They also organised rosters so that grass was kept cut and facilities were kept clean, tidy, warm, and safe for children. (Often, these last mentioned duties were shared with members of other groups who also used the halls for community events.)

Other duties that parents at each group were expected to carry out (a duty roster system operated at each group whereby two parents were available at each session to help the teachers) included unlocking the building before the teachers arrived, helping unpack the van and set up the session, preparing the morning or afternoon tea for both children and adults, cleaning and tidying up during the session, and preparing equipment for reloading into the van at the session's end. They were also expected to carry out general supervision of children, and to take full responsibility for their own toddlers or babies. While not expected to work with the children, the teachers welcomed the parents' involvement.

The teachers commented that they found parents very helpful at each of the groups that they visited. They felt that they had only to ask the parents to carry out a task and they would do it willingly. Based on her experience, the head teacher felt that, in general, parents associated with the Marlborough mobile pre-school unit were much more helpful than those associated with a 'conventional' town kindergarten. She attributed this to parents from rural areas being so pleased to have the mobile pre-school unit available that they were only too happy to 'do their bit' to safeguard the service. The teachers also felt that help from parents not only facilitated the smooth running of sessions but also helped parents by making them feel involved and as if the group belonged to them.

Facilities Available to the Marlborough Mobile Pre-School Unit

Detailed descriptions of the facilities available to each of the groups visited by the Marlborough mobile pre-school unit teachers are included on page 365 following. However, in answer to the question 'Are there any particular problems with the facilities (accommodation) available at the different locations or groups that you visit which affect your work with the children (and parents)?' the head teacher stated that:

> ***"The main problem we have is with the Havelock building. It is freezing cold there. Other problems at the various venues [include] inadequate or non-existent storage for equipment and the fact that you can't put children's work or posters on the walls at some places to give them a bit of colour and make them look less shoddy. At some places you wouldn't dare leave stuff because it would walk [ie go missing]. In other places there is no fencing but I don't know that that is a tremendously big problem because the kids don't tend to wander off anyway. One of the problems in Rai Valley is that the windows look out onto the school playing field [which is out of bounds for the pre-schoolers] rather than onto where the children actually play [ie in a small area on the other side of the building] but there is nothing much we can do***

> ***about that, except that we try hard to ensure that there is always a parent out there supervising in case we [ie the teachers] both end up working inside and nobody is outside supervising. But you know you have to put up with the sort of accommodation that you get given. There is no problem with van access to any of the venues except for Havelock in the winter when the grass gets very wet and muddy.***
>
> ***One of the biggest difficulties with venues, I think, is the fact that often there aren't two rooms, one where the parents can go and talk and do their thing and be with their babies if necessary because they [the parents] can sometimes create a lot of unnecessary noise. In the last week at Wairau Valley and Havelock we have sent the parents off to watch a video with the district health nurse and we did so much more with the children not having the parents around. Although we like having the parents [at sessions], it was good to have a break [from them] and it would be good if the parents sometimes had a separate place to talk, especially on wet or cold days when things get so crowded inside."***

The other teacher expressed very similar comments in relation to facilities available in which to run sessions but did not feel that the problems were overwhelming - just part of the job.

Facilities Available to the Teachers for Administration and Planning Work

The teachers shared office accommodation with members of their local kindergarten association. The office, situated within the grounds of one of the Blenheim kindergartens was modern and well appointed. As both parties used the office on a part-time basis only, they were able to arrange their hours so that they did not coincide and interrupt one another during the course of their work. The teachers found that sharing office accommodation worked well in most respects, and were grateful that they did not have to share office space belonging to another kindergarten as had been the case for teachers on the mobile unit in earlier years. The only aspect of the arrangement that was not entirely satisfactory was lack of storage space for kindergarten equipment (eg supplies of puzzles, books, etc) not being used in a particular week and therefore not carried on the van. The teachers felt that it would have been better if they had had a separate storage shed for equipment so that they could arrange it in a more convenient and easily accessible way and not have to worry about possible inconvenience to the others with whom they shared the office.

The teachers stated that they enjoyed the proximity of their office to the 'town kindergarten' as it gave them an opportunity to meet with the teachers there and exchange experiences and ideas and, on occasion, items of equipment.

Equipment Used by the Marlborough Mobile Pre-School Unit

The equipment that the teachers carried on the van with them, provided from the mobile unit's central store, formed the basis of activities at sessions. Any equipment owned by particular groups and stored at venues was used to supplement what the teachers brought with them rather than the other way around. The teachers felt that this was the most appropriate way for the mobile unit to operate, partly because they felt that many of their groups did not have the money to build up a suitable supply of equipment and materials for themselves and partly because they felt that when resources were directed into buying a central supply of equipment, this ensured that all groups had access to the same range of equipment and avoided a situation where some children missed out The teachers, however, appreciated having extra furniture and so on at the different venues to supplement what they were able to fit into the van.

The mobile unit teachers carried six chairs in the van with them, as well as all the mats that they put down on the floor at each venue to make children feel as comfortable as possible when spending time in the bookcorner etc. The mobile unit's two mice, complete with their own little cage, also travelled in the van as a matter of course, and were brought out at each group for the children to look at or handle. (The mice were very friendly and well used to being handled by a great many children.)

Other equipment used by the mobile unit (ie as observed during the fieldwork period) included a recently purchased canvas crawl tunnel, a set of Duplo blocks (also a recent purchase), equipment for dough play, sandpit tools and vehicles, supplies of paper, paints, brushes, scissors, sellotape, staplers, and collage materials, wooden blocks and toys, puzzles, musical instruments and a tape recorder (although these were not used during the fieldwork period), and a large, steadily increasing supply of books. The equipment and materials carried on the van were supplemented, on most occasions, by equipment and materials which belonged to specific groups and were stored at the different venues. Apart from sandpits, swings, cable reels and other items designed for outdoor play, at least some of which were available at all seven venues visited, such supplementary equipment often included dressing up clothes, dolls, a trolley, tricycles, worktables, and chairs in addition to those brought on the van.

Apart from their supply of books (discussed further below) the selection of equipment available to the mobile pre-school unit teachers was not as extensive as that at some of the other mobile units. The Marlborough unit did not, for example, own a set of Lego or equipment such as water tanks and, while some groups had a trolley and/or a selection of other wheeled 'vehicles', these were not owned by the mobile unit *per se* and were therefore not available for use by all seven groups.

The teachers attributed their relatively restricted range of equipment to lack of money and stated that they were very keen to buy more resources if at all possible, especially so that they could better cater for the wide age range of children who typically attended many sessions. They mentioned that not all parents paid subsidies, making it even more difficult to purchase the equipment they would have liked. But, as well, by their own admission, the teachers were not certain what money they were entitled to, through subsidies, for the purchase of equipment. They were, however, intending to contact teachers at the two other South Island mobile units - both of which had very good supplies of basic equipment - to find out. (Also, rather than buying more 'exciting' items, the teachers stated that in the early days of their appointment, they had had to buy such basic equipment as "... teachers' scissors and a supply of balls... " as these and other items of equipment appeared to have been lost over the years, always a potential problem for mobile units given the itinerant nature of the service provided.) The teachers were also keen to learn from the other units what items of equipment they had found worked well in the mobile context and were interested in some photographs of equipment in use that the researcher had taken when visiting other units in the course of the study.

Although, relative to some other mobile units, they did not have a particulary wide range of equipment at their disposal, the Marlborough mobile pre-school unit teachers had for some time been concentrating their efforts on building up an extensive supply of quality books. Except during holiday periods (when teachers preferred to call all books in in order to check their inventory), children were able to borrow these books on a lending library basis. This was a service greatly appreciated by both children and parents in the communities served by the mobile unit, as they did not have ready access to libraries or bookshops as people living in towns or cities do. Several parents commented to the researcher during the fieldwork period how much they and their children looked forward to borrowing a different book each week. (The teachers were also steadily accumulating a supply of books on child development, parenting etc for parents to borrow as they chose. They reported that the number of parents who borrowed these books was gradually increasing.)

As well as their library service, the teachers organised a 'book-fair' once or twice a year, whereby they ordered children's books from suppliers such as Ashton-Scholastic. The books received were then taken around to each group to give parents a chance to buy what they wanted. This served the dual purpose of giving parents in isolated areas access to good quality books at very reasonable prices (the teachers reported that these 'fairs' were extremely popular with all of their groups) and was a way of raising some money in order to buy more books for the mobile unit itself.

The Mobile Unit's Van

The van used by the Marlborough mobile pre-school unit (in common with most of the other units, this was a Ford Econovan) did not have fitted shelves - as was the case in the Waimate mobile unit's van, for example - but the head teacher was keen to follow up on ideas for improving the efficiency of the storage and transportation of equipment in the van. The van was stored overnight and at weekends in the Telecom Yard in Blenheim. It was serviced, along with other Department of Education vehicles, by a mechanic employed by the department. As well as routine maintenance, it was given a thorough check over at least once a term. The teachers kept a daily record of kilometres travelled and, each week, recorded the amount of petrol used. These records were sent to the Department of Education office in Christchurch each week; the garage which supplied the petrol (the mobile unit had an account with a Blenheim service station) was then paid by the Christchurch office. The teachers shared the driving of the van. (A short time before the fieldwork period, both teachers had attended a defensive driving course which had been paid for by their kindergarten association. Despite the precaution of attending the defensive driving course which both teachers had found most worthwhile, one of the teachers, however, discussed a particular concern for her, associated with driving the van. This was that, because of the design of the van, they were at risk of being very badly injured should they be involved in a head-on collision (very much an occupational hazard of their job with the amount of driving they did each week). The reason for this was that because the van's motor was under the front seat rather than under a bonnet, as is the case with most vehicles, there was nothing at all to protect the driver and passenger should any other vehicle hit the van from the front. This teacher, only half jokingly, suggested that perhaps mobile unit teachers should receive "danger money".)

An Aspect of Providing the Mobile Unit Service: The Teachers' Experience

At the time the fieldwork was carried out, one of the groups being visited by the mobile unit was very small - only four children old enough to be officially enrolled attended. The teachers felt that it would be better use of their time and resources if this group was put into recess (parents would then, they claimed, be able to take their children to another group, which although several kilometres more distant was not an impossible option), thus freeing them to visit another district they knew of where there was a sizeable number of pre-schoolers without access to early childhood education. The teachers reported, however, that their proposal was not acceptable to their local kindergarten assoication. One of the teachers, expressing the views held by both teachers, commented as follows about this aspect of their work on the mobile unit:

> *"... I think that unless the people that you are working with, you know, who are in that authority position [ie the kindergarten association], are familiar with the mobile unit set-up, it becomes an inflexible, conventional kindergarten and I don't believe that the mobile should be set up like that. It should be extremely flexible - you should be able to go into the areas that you feel are justified without them [the kindergarten association] making submissions against you and making it all a huge problem... It seems ludicrous to me that we are going to a place that doesn't really need us - at least not as much as we are needed elsewhere - when we could be going to [another area] where there are about 20 kids and parents desperate to have the mobile unit... But we don't have any say in opening or closing groups or even much say in altering itineraries which is very wrong but I don't know what you can do to change that. It's very frustrating... I don't believe that the kindergarten association should have so much involvement in decisions - all they should be is a back up for us really in that they should accept more readily what the delegates [parent committee members] and the teachers have to say because the delegates work really well with the teachers and we look at it from the point of view that we are all trying to help the van as a total unit and I don't believe that a kindergarten association understands the nature of a mobile unit kindergarten - that it is different from a town kindergarten. And they are not even kindergarten teachers."*

Teachers' Comments on what a 'Typical' Day or Week was Like for Them on the Marlborough Mobile Pre-School Unit

Teacher 1

"[A] typical [day/week] would really just be that I walk into town and pick up the van and pick up [the other teacher] and then head off to whichever venue [we are going to that morning]. Although the road might remain the same, the conditions on the road will be different each week - some foggy days, ice sometimes, slow traffic, cattle, dogs, tractors, lots of trucks. We often seem to be travelling at the same time as the trucks. When we get to our destination, typically it would just be that we are greeted by whoever the mother-helper is and we start unpacking the van and then the children start arriving and the session is underway. The time seems to fly and all of a sudden you think 'goodness, we had better issue the library books and go through the scrapbooks [ie the children's 'homework books'] and we'd better start tidying up ready to set off to the next [venue]'. So those things seem to be pretty typical every day. The time just literally flies during a session but what happens in that time is quite a lot different at each session. Lots of different things happen and I don't really believe that there is one day that is the same except in the actual routine of unpacking the van and packing up again and charging on to the next venue. The children that come can vary a lot at each group and when we don't see them every day they can seem quite different each time. I mean, we only see them once a week so of course they are different a lot of those times - their behaviour and their moods. So while there are certain things that are typical every day on the mobile unit, it is also always different. Lots of variety."

Teacher 2

"A typical day or week would be with quiet and settled sessions with children of varying ages and lots of parent intervention and a fairly full programme running throughout the session. Also providing as much indoor and outdoor play as we can at the different venues."

A DESCRIPTION OF EACH VENUE VISITED AND SESSIONS HELD BY THE MARLBOROUGH MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT DURING THE FIELDWORK PERIOD

In order to fit in with the teachers' commitments, observations began mid-week and continued through to the end of the Tuesday afternoon session the following week. (Descriptions of each session are presented in the order in which they were observed.) The researcher was able to travel to and from sessions with the teachers in the mobile unit's van.

HAVELOCK: WEDNESDAY MORNING, 27 APRIL 1988

After collecting the van from the Telecom Yard where it was garaged, the teachers - and the researcher - left Blenheim at 8.35am, arriving at the Havelock venue, 45 kilometres from Blenheim, at 9.10am. No parents had yet arrived and, as they did not have a key to the building, the teachers had to wait until someone came to open up before they could begin unpacking the van and preparing for the session. The parent on duty arrived with the key five minutes later. With the parent's help, everything was able to be set up in time for the session to start promptly at 9.30am - although children who had arrived with their parents before that time, immediately began playing together or with whatever equipment was available.

Havelock is a small township of around 300 people located on the main Picton-Blenheim-Nelson route. It revolves chiefly around farming, fishing, and mussel-farming but also serves the tourist industry for the Pelorus Sound area. It is a very scenic drive from Blenheim, with beautiful views all the way. The teachers commented that the scenery was a major bonus for them in the course of their work on the mobile pre-school unit.

The Facilities Available to the Havelock Group

The Havelock group met in a small, very old wooden building located at the far end of a large war memorial park-cum-playing field. Access to the building was gained via a minor road leading off from the main Blenheim-Nelson highway, and then by driving around one side of the field - on the grass, as the road did not extend this far. The van was then able to be parked directly outside the doors to the hall, facilitating the loading and unloading of equipment into and out of the van. The hall backed onto another (no-exit) road, which led to a boat harbour. This was often a busy site with boat owners driving to and from the harbour.

The Sea Scouts Hall used by the Havelock group

The teachers felt that the building was not well located because it got very little sun, especially in winter. They stated that because it could get so very cold in the hall some parents did not always bring their children to sessions during the winter months. However, they also felt that this problem could be alleviated to some extent if it could be ensured that the parents on duty remembered to arrive at the venue early enough to turn heaters on, thereby taking the chill off the air before the session was due to begin.

Because of the lack of sun, the teachers and the Havelock group's parent committee were hoping to get the building moved eventually - to within the grounds of the reasonably near-by primary school, perhaps, or even to the other side of the field where it would get more sun. An added benefit of such a move, according to the teachers, would be that of improved access. The teachers said that, in winter months, there was always the danger of getting the van stuck while crossing the wet and muddy field. In the worst winter weather they had to use the road behind the hall leading to the boat harbour, but this meant that, because it was not possible to get the van around to the front of the building, they had to carry all equipment right around the hall, which was both heavy work and extremely uncomfortable when it was pouring with rain. (Some time before either of the teachers had been appointed to their positions on the mobile unit, the Havelock group had been offered a prefabricated building to meet in, but much to the teachers' regret - because, they said, the age of the building meant that it had other inadequacies besides that of lack of sun - the parents then associated with the group turned the offer down. The parent group at the time the fieldwork was carried out would have been glad to accept the offer.)

Double doors in the middle of the hall opened directly onto the park. Inside, the hall was painted pale yellow with a white, raftered ceiling. The windows, positioned too high for the children to see out of, were covered with metal grids; there were no curtains. Mats were scattered about on the wooden floor. As well as the main room, there was a kitchen containing a sink, Zip unit, and refrigerator; the hall also included one toilet and an alcove used to store equipment and to hang children's paintings to dry. (The teachers commented that another disadvantage of the building was that, because there was only the one room with space enough for people to sit down, parents could not separate themselves from the children to avoid causing a disturbance when chatting together or when they wished to hold their committee meetings - scheduled during session times every two months.)

The Havelock group was the only one of all those visited by the Marlborough mobile pre-school unit to have almost exclusive use of its facilities. (The only other people to use the building were the Sea Scouts, who met there only on an infrequent basis.) Because it was almost the sole occupant, the mobile unit's group was able to leave a considerable amount of equipment set up in the hall. This included a permanently established book corner (but supplemented by books brought on the van), a piano, a big, old easy-chair, old wooden benches or forms placed in the middle of the room, mattresses for jumping on, dressing up clothes and accessories, a mirror on one wall, a block corner, a wooden truck large enough for a child to sit in, easels, telephones, an ironing board, and a table, oven, cutters, and rolling pins for dough play. At this session, large, wooden 'boxes' (with slots in the side for ease of handling) were also brought out from the storage area and arranged so as to make a hut for the children in one corner. (The teachers reported that they frequently varied how they used these boxes.) Lots of children's art work, posters, and a large wall hanging, consisting of 'pockets' labelled with each child's name in which to 'post' notices to parents or to store completed paintings and personal belongings until they were ready to be collected by their owners, also formed part of the overall pre-school environment.

Outside, the teachers used a portable wire fence to section off a portion of the park as a play area for the children. (Although the fence was not very robust, the teachers felt that, with the ratio of adults to children that was customary at this group, there was little likelihood of any child 'escaping'.) Within this area, local parents had arranged to have a small sandpit dug; there was also a swing made from a tyre suspended from a metal frame.

The Session

The head teacher and a relieving teacher conducted the session. Prior to her resignation four years earlier, the relieving teacher had herself been head teacher on the Marlborough unit for several years. She was therefore well acquainted with the nature of the work and its specific requirements. (She had also relieved for one or other of the mobile unit teachers in recent weeks.)

Fifteen children attended the session, 13 of whom were of enrolled age (ie three years or older). The head teacher commented that several regular attenders were absent today; because children in the district were scheduled to receive their hepatitis B inoculations that afternoon she felt that their parents perhaps did not want to have to make two separate trips on the same day.

The equipment and activities brought on the van to supplement what was already available in the hall included Duplo and puzzles, both set out on the floor, collage materials (eg egg cartons, pieces of sheepskin and other fabrics, paint, glue, sellotape, and scissors), brightly-coloured dough and implements for cutting and shaping it, a selection of books to look at during the session plus a separate box of books from which children could borrow a book to take home, a set of large wooden blocks, paper, paints and brushes, a mixture suitable for finger painting, a crawl tunnel, and the mobile unit's two mice complete with their own little mobile home. As well as those already available at the venue, the teachers also set out, around the tables used for collage and dough play, the six chairs that they carried on the van.

The session was predominantly free play, with the teachers moving between small groups and working with individual children. As they worked with the children - eg helping them with their collage work or to complete puzzles, the teachers engaged as many children as they could in conversation. The head teacher also took time during the morning to have a look at what some of the older children had done in their 'homework books' and to write in additional ideas for activities to work on at home with their parents in the week(s) to follow. One or other of the teachers was also observed to help children write their name on their paintings, bounce toddlers on the mattress and help them through the crawl tunnel, play 'rough-and-tumble' with two or three children, hug older children while working with him or her or just when passing, and showing a shy new child where to store his belongings.

Children were variously observed to play in the hut made out of the large wooden boxes, dress up, iron clothes, bounce on the mattress, play together in the crawl tunnel, look at books, and work with Duplo, puzzles, and the large wooden blocks. They also spent time at the dough table, completed paintings, and created various objects out of the collage materials which were available. A popular activity was that of finger painting which, according to the head teacher, the children had not done "in ages". All children were helped to put aprons on before attempting this and other equally messy activities.

Although it was a calm, sunny day the grass was very wet from a heavy dew, and because so little sun reached the place where the group met, the teachers felt it was too cold, at least initially, to set up activities outside. Towards the end of the session, however, when more sun had reached the grass outside the hall, some children preferred to play outside. The crawl tunnel was therefore brought out and a box of metal vehicles and tools for using in the sandpit were unpacked from the van. (The children preferred to play with these on the grass rather than in the sandpit on this occasion.)

The entire group, including parents, gathered for morning tea mid-way through the session. One child was celebrating her fifth birthday so, as well as pieces of apple, grapes, and orange juice, there was also a piece of birthday cake for each child. Following morning tea - which lasted 12 minutes in all - and singing "happy birthday", children returned to the activities of their choice.

At about 11.05am, parents, and the teachers too when not continuing to work with different children, began the tidying-up process and to stack some equipment ready for loading into the van. Mat-time with the entire group - led, on this occasion, by the relieving teacher - was held from 11.15am until the session ended shortly after 11.30am. During mat-time, the group did exercises, sang songs (some with accompanying actions), and listened to a story.

Preparing to finger paint, Havelock

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In and around the mobile unit's van, Havelock

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Using the crawl tunnel, Havelock

At the collage table, Havelock

Nicolle
JayBees

Parents

Seven parents remained throughout the session, including the mother whose turn it was to 'be on duty'. This parent, after unlocking the hall and helping the teachers with unpacking the van and setting up the session, gave the kitchen and part of the main hall a thorough vacuuming. She then cut up pieces of apple and poured glasses of fruit juice for the children's morning tea and prepared tea or coffee (plus biscuits) for the adults.

Although the parents spent most of the session chatting together and to the teachers they also carried out general supervision and helped children by, for example, putting paper on easels and removing completed paintings and hanging them up to dry. As well, they took an interest in what children were doing by sitting near them while they (the children) worked and played. Conversation amongst the adults was mostly informal although one or two parents did seek information from the teachers about aspects of child development. Three committee members also discussed a forthcoming meeting with the head teacher, while the treasurer consulted her about a financial matter. One parent took the opportunity to do her knitting while chatting with the others.

Prior to mat-time, one parent took charge of issuing library books to all who wanted them (and everybody did) and, early in the session, another assisted the head teacher erect the portable fence. (This parent initially objected to putting up the fence on the grounds that the grass was too wet but finally agreed that it would be better for the children to allow them to have a run outside if they wanted to.) Everybody helped to clean up at the end of the session.

Comments from the Teacher Diaries[2]

Main activities involved in:

> ***"A birthday session at mat-time. Both teachers share all responsibilities."***
>
> ***"Inside play only - no outside equipment able to be used due to cold, wet conditions outdoors."***

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[2] Comments from the 'Teacher Diaries' quoted on this and subsequent pages are those made by the teachers in the week beginning 27 June, 1988.

Parents chatting together in the book corner, Havelock

Parents with children, Havelock

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Best/worst things about the session:

> ***"Best thing about the session was good contact with a shy child. Weather was lovely [but] our venue does not lend itself to making use of the outdoors."***
>
> ***"Best thing was good parent contact. Worst was that our cold venue makes life uncomfortable in winter."***

ADMINISTRATION SESSION AT BASE: WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON, 27 APRIL 1988

After the morning session at Havelock the teachers returned to their office in Blenheim for lunch and to carry out administrative and planning tasks. During the afternoon, the teachers took the opportunity to give all the paint containers and brushes a thorough washing, something that was not easy to do with being constantly on the move between groups. They also completed order forms for new equipment, made preliminary arrangements for a book fair which was planned as a fundraising activity in the third term, discussed what they could do in forthcoming sessions, talked to the researcher about the study, and exchanged news, and ideas for activities to use with children, with the teachers in the kindergarten located just in front of their (the mobile unit teachers') office. As well, they catalogued some new books which had been donated by parents (it was 'traditional' for parents to donate books to the kindergarten when their children turned five years and left to go to school), made some dough, and tidied the van.

RAI VALLEY: THURSDAY MORNING, 28 APRIL 1988

The teachers left Telecom Yard shortly after 8.30am, arriving at Rai Valley at 9.25am. Although the 71 kilometre trip from Blenheim to Rai Valley would not normally take almost an hour, during the late autumn amd winter months traffic has to travel this route very slowly and with lights on, on account of thick mist which blankets much of the road every morning until about midday. This makes travelling potentially hazardous; the teachers also felt that the mist has a depressing influence on people who have to live with it every day for weeks on end.

Rai Valley is an attractive, small settlement on the main Picton to Nelson highway. Its main function is to serve the surrounding farming community. It includes a primary school and several shops.

Facilities Available to the Rai Valley Group

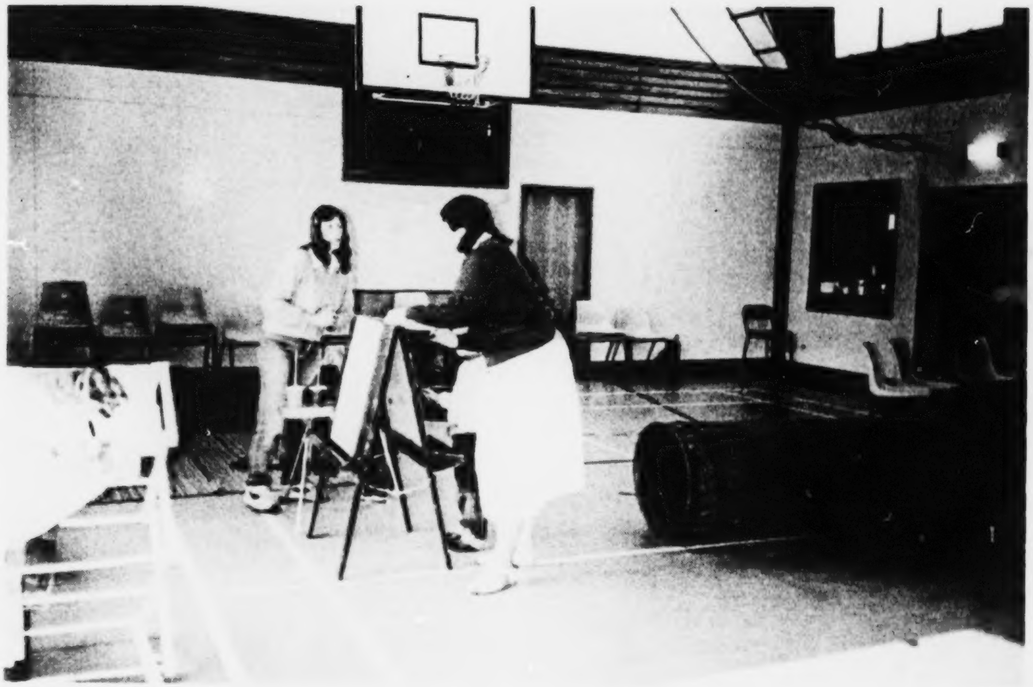
The Rai Valley group met at the Rai Valley primary school. The school allowed the mobile pre-school unit to use its gymnasium (or, because it was not quite large enough to meet the official dimensions required for a gymnasium, more correctly known as the 'multi-purpose room').

The facilities available to the group were very attractive and this was a favourite venue for the teachers. The gymnasium/multi-purpose room was modern (little more than two years old) and still seemed very clean and new. It was also light, bright, and comfortably warm. The interior walls - some fitted with ropes and wooden rungs and pegs for climbing purposes - were of pine wood coated with polyurethane so that the basic golden colour of the wood was retained. The ceiling incorporated large beams painted in a burgundy shade while the floor was of polyurethaned cork tiles with red, white, and yellow painted stripes; there were brown curtains. As well as the main room - easily large enough to hold a school assembly in - there was a well equipped kitchen with a serving slide into the main room, separate toilet and shower facilities for boys and girls, and one or two smaller rooms which were primarily used for storing gym equipment and chairs. Although - not unexpectedly, given the primary purpose of the facilities - there were no posters or other decorations on the walls, these were not essential as the room seemed to be cheerful and colourful enough without it, and particularly so once the teachers had put some mats down, put the portable wooden bookstand in place, and set up all the other activities being made available on this occasion.

There was a large playing field out in front of the building but the pre-school children were not permitted to play there during session times. Instead, there was an area (part concrete, part grass) especially for them at the rear of the building; this was enclosed on three sides - by fences on two sides and by the building itself on the third. Although the fourth side was not fenced it opened onto a concreted playing area within the school's grounds, well away from the road and traffic. The children were asked not to go beyond their designated area without a teacher or parent present and the adult-child ratio typical for this group meant that it was not difficult to ensure that children kept to this rule.

Front and rear views of the Rai Valley venue

Indoors at the Rai Valley venue



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The outdoor play area incorporated a sandpit and slide. As well, there was a storage shed which was for the sole use of the mobile pre-school group. The group was able to store a considerable amount of equipment there including tricycles, a scooter and trolley, a large wooden truck which could be ridden (the truck had been made by a German-born craftsperson living in the area and donated to the group), a painting easel, a rack on which to hang children's paintings to dry, and tables and chairs of an appropriate size for the children to use while working on activities.

The Rai Valley group's storage shed

The Session

Both of the usual teachers were at work today. This was a relatively large group with - on this occasion - 15 children of enrolled age attending plus three babies and three toddlers. (The teachers commented that, often, even more children from the younger age range attended but felt that their parents had perhaps not brought them today because of the weather. Although it had been calm and sunny in Blenheim, the temperature at Rai Valley - on account of the mist - was only three degrees Celsius. The teachers further commented that they never knew quite what to expect when they arrived each week at the Rai Valley venue because they could not be sure what the age range of the children would be - ie whether there would be a majority of children under three years to work with or whether there would mainly be older children present. They said that the children's age determined to a large extent what they were able to do with the group on a given day and meant that they always had to be prepared by bringing activities of varying difficulty levels in the van with them.) The toddlers alternately stayed near their mothers and tried some of the activities such as playing with blocks and looking at books. The teachers sometimes carried one baby or other around with them while working with the older children. They also took time to hug the toddlers.

The session got off to a leisurely start with several parents and their children not arriving until 10am (probably because it was so cold earlier). Only the parent on duty was at the venue when the teachers arrived; she had unlocked and had begun to bring in furniture from the storage shed. She also helped the teachers unpack the van and set up activities; most setting up had been completed by 9.45am. Although setting up was not completed until at least 15 minutes after the official starting time of 9.30am (and one teacher also spent a further quarter of an hour or so in the kitchen preparing a mixture of cornflour, water, and colour for the finger painting activity), one of the teachers frequently interrupted her activities to chat and otherwise interact with children as they arrived while the other teacher chatted to several parents in the kitchen while stirring the finger paint mixture. (She also made enough finger paint to use with the afternoon group as well.)

The activities and equipment available at this session included the dough table, Duplo, puzzles, books, crayons and paper, paints, brushes, and paper clipped to easels, coloured 'straws' for linking together (see, for example, the child in the photo on the rear cover of this report who is working on a similar activity), a range of materials for collage work, buckets, tools and metal vehicles for using in the sandpit, the crawl tunnel, the large wooden truck and the tricycles and other wheeled vehicles which belonged specifically to this group, and the slide. There was also finger painting which was a major focus of the session (the teachers actively encouraged each child to take a turn at it). As well as finger painting *per se*, the children were encouraged by the teachers to extend the activity by first forming a picture in the finger painting mixture spread out on the table, laying a piece of paper over the top and then carefully pressing down on it. Once the paper was peeled off, again very gently, the children found that a print of the picture drawn on the table had been transferred to the paper. As usual, the mobile unit's mice had been brought along and, as was also customary, a wall hanging (put together by parents associated with this group) consisting of 'pockets' made out of brightly coloured fabrics was hooked up on one wall. The purpose of the pockets was to enable each child to have somewhere of his or her own in which to store bags, coats, scrapbooks, library books, and completed paintings or other art work.

All available activities and equipment were made use of to at least some extent by the children at this session.

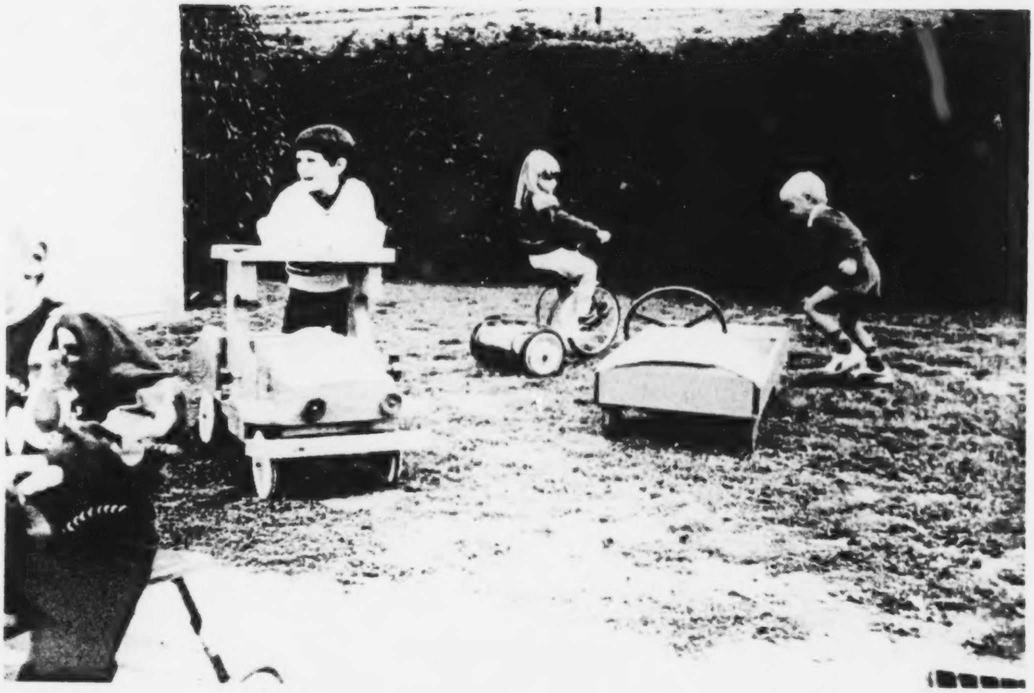
Apart from the mat-time which brought the session to a close, the children were free to move around activities as they chose. The teachers had no set pattern for inside/outside supervision (on occasion, both teachers were inside at the same time, leaving parents to supervise outside, or vice versa) but moved around amongst small groups of children (and parents), or worked with children on an individual basis.

One child had a walking problem due to shortened tendons in her heel which made it very difficult for her to keep her heels on the ground in the usual way. Both teachers were observed to gently but firmly remind the child throughout the morning to keep trying to put her heels right down instead of walking on tip-toes. They also demonstrated what they meant and explained to her at length that this was very important if she was to avoid having an operation (something that the mother did not want to happen). The child took these reminders in good part and smiled and chatted constantly with the teachers.

The teachers also spent as much time as they could with another child who, although he painted excellent pictures and could recognise and write his own name and so on, did not respond well when spoken to. His ability to pay attention and maintain eye contact seemed poor and he often appeared to take no notice of anyone who addressed him. The teachers therefore made a point of getting him to talk to them as often as possible, sometimes holding his face to ensure eye contact; they reported that they felt he had made a lot of progress in recent months. (The teachers had also recommended to his parents that he attend a speech therapist in Nelson, a suggestion which the parents adopted. His visits to the therapist, together with the work put in by his mother at home, were also having positive outcomes.) Both teachers were further observed to address a child they described as "very shy" whenever they were near him; they also actively encouraged him to join in at several activities.

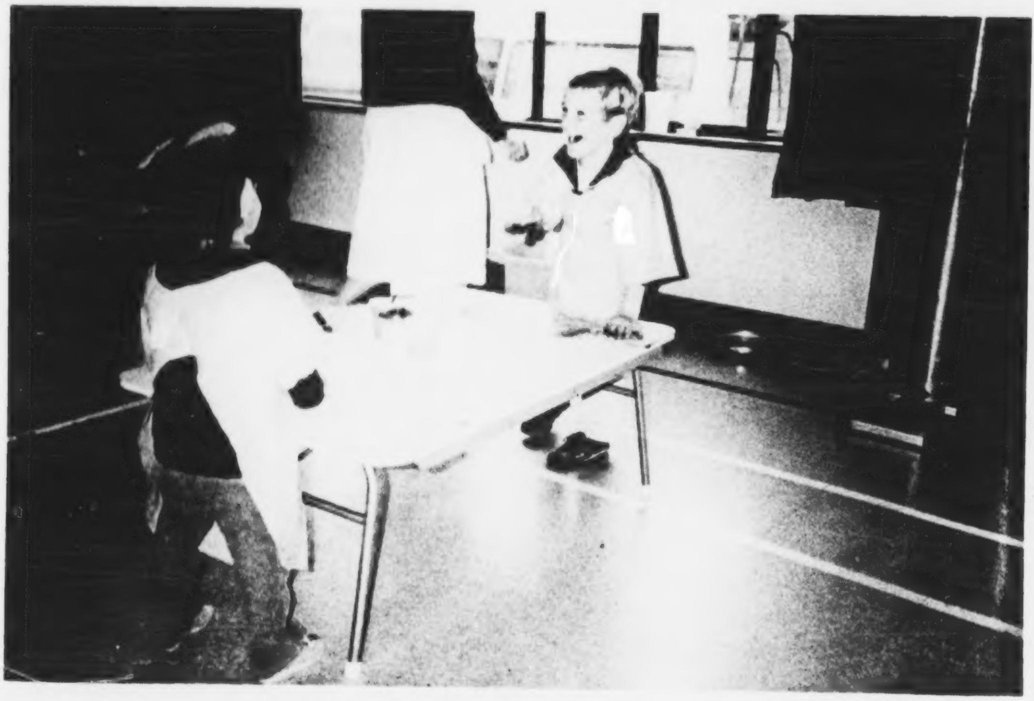
At 10.45am, the parent on duty set out glasses of milk and pieces of apple on a central table for the children's morning tea; most children chose to come and eat and drink together although a few preferred to carry on with other activities. Neither teacher was with the children during the five minute break (one went to the office in the main school building to use the telephone while the other spent time talking to a parent outside) but several parents supervised the children while having their own coffee or tea and the delicious home-baked muffins which the parent on duty had provided. Children returned to available activities as soon as they had had enough to eat and drink.

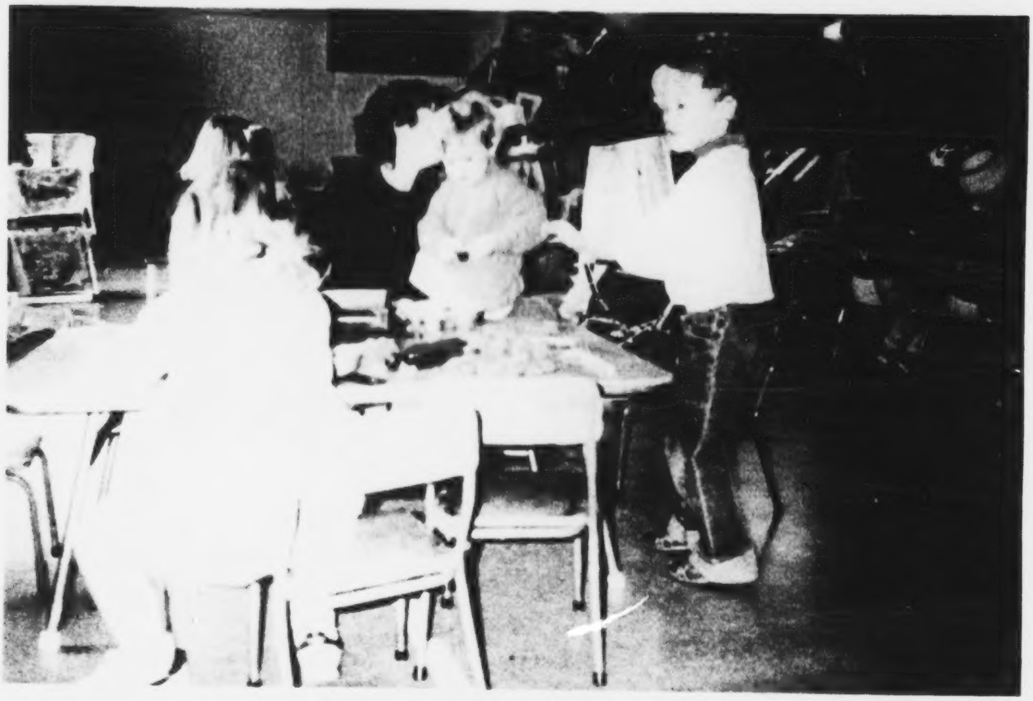
Outdoor play, Rai Valley



More outdoor play, Rai Valley

Finger painting, Rai Valley (note child's head gear!)





Dough play, Rai Valley

One-to-one interaction between teacher and child, Rai Valley

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Morning tea at Rai Valley

One of the teachers took the opportunity to collect two white mice from the school which she had promised her own children (pupils from one of the more senior classes were conducting a long-term project on the care and breeding of mice and as a result had their own colony); on her return she spent several minutes showing the new mice - one of which lacked an ear - to a small group of mobile unit children, explaining why they have whiskers, a scaly tail etc, and what one has to do to care for them properly. The children were interested and asked questions frequently. They also considered possible explanations for the missing ear.

The head teacher spent time with several of the older children (ie those aged three years or more) throughout the session commenting on what they had done in their homework books since the last session and writing in suggestions for further activities. (The teacher stated that the time she had to spend at sessions going through the children's homework books varied considerably - it depended on the age range at a particular group and on how many children remembered to bring their work along to be checked. However, she reported that there were usually several scrapbooks at least to look at each week at Rai Valley as many of the parents liked to take an active part in what their children were doing.)

Teacher and child going through a 'homework book'

The session ended with a mat-time taken by the head teacher while the other teacher worked with the parents on packing up and cleaning. Mat-time included (unaccompanied) singing and finger-play, followed by a story about a teddy bears picnic. The story led on to a group discussion about the hepatitis B inoculations taking place locally and the teddy bears' picnic that the mobile unit had held the previous week for several of its groups. This (latter) topic generated enthusiastic comments from some children and smiles from other younger or shyer children in response to what the teacher was saying. (The teachers reported that the picnic had been very successful, with lovely weather and everyone having an enjoyable time.)

At the end of mat-time there was a fracas between two children over 'ownership' of a library book that they both wanted to take home. One child, in particular, became very upset and the head teacher took him out on to the steps leading to the outdoor area. She sat with her arm around him for several minutes until he was no longer upset and explained to him how he should have reacted in the situation. He eventually went off happily enough and was helped to select a different book to borrow.

During the final tidy-up, after some instruction (eg one child was shown how to pack the dough play equipment neatly) several children assisted the adults while others spent their final minutes at the group in dramatic play. This involved the children in a 'space game' whereby they became space teddy bears and used rockets to fly into space for picnics. (Although initiated by the head teacher, this soon became a very much child-centred pursuit.) The game seemed to involve a great deal of racing around in the hall. The teachers finally left the venue at 11.45am. The atmosphere throughout the session, for both adults and children, appeared relaxed and comfortable.

Parents

Ten parents (all women) remained throughout the session and another was present for the final three-quarters of an hour. As well as helping the teachers set up the session, the parent on duty was responsible for preparing the morning tea for both children and adults and for issuing and receiving returned library books. She recorded the whereabouts of each book in a register.

Each week at the Rai Valley venue, a part of the hall was devoted to parents - ie several adult-sized chairs were grouped together for the parents' use. In this area, an activity blanket with zips and other fastenings and appliqued animals and brightly-coloured fabric shapes attached to it was placed on the floor so that the babies and toddlers who had accompanied their parents not only had somewhere comfortable to sit or lie but also had something colourful and interesting to occupy them. A container of coloured blocks and other toys suitable for babies and toddlers was also made available.

While the parents spent much of the session chatting casually amongst themselves and to the teachers, several also worked with or observed children undertaking the different activities. For example, shortly after morning tea it was noted that two parents were helping children complete puzzles, while others were sitting alongside children looking at books and working with Duplo. One of the teachers was also heard to advise a parent to keep encouraging her very shy child to attempt to play with dough and other activities because she (the child) was quite capable of doing so once she gained in confidence. Another parent also sought advice from one of the teachers about her child's behaviour at home; they spent several minutes discussing this together.

The activity mat in the 'parents' corner'

Almost all of the 11 parents present helped with the final tidying up and packing of equipment. They also supervised during morning tea and for a short time outside while both teachers were occupied elsewhere.

The teachers commented that there was a very active parent group at Rai Valley. One parent, for example, organised weekly music sessions for parents and children while another organised playgroup sessions which took place in different parents' homes on a regular basis. (The Rai Valley group was the only one of those visited by the Marlborough mobile pre-school unit to hold sessions on the days when the teachers did not visit their area.)

Comments from the Teacher Diaries

Main activities involved in:

> ***"One teacher concentrated on outside activities and mat-time while the other concentrated on small groups - working to encourage cooperative play."***

Best/worst aspects of session:

> ***"It was a quiet, orderly session. I enjoyed it."***

Other comments:

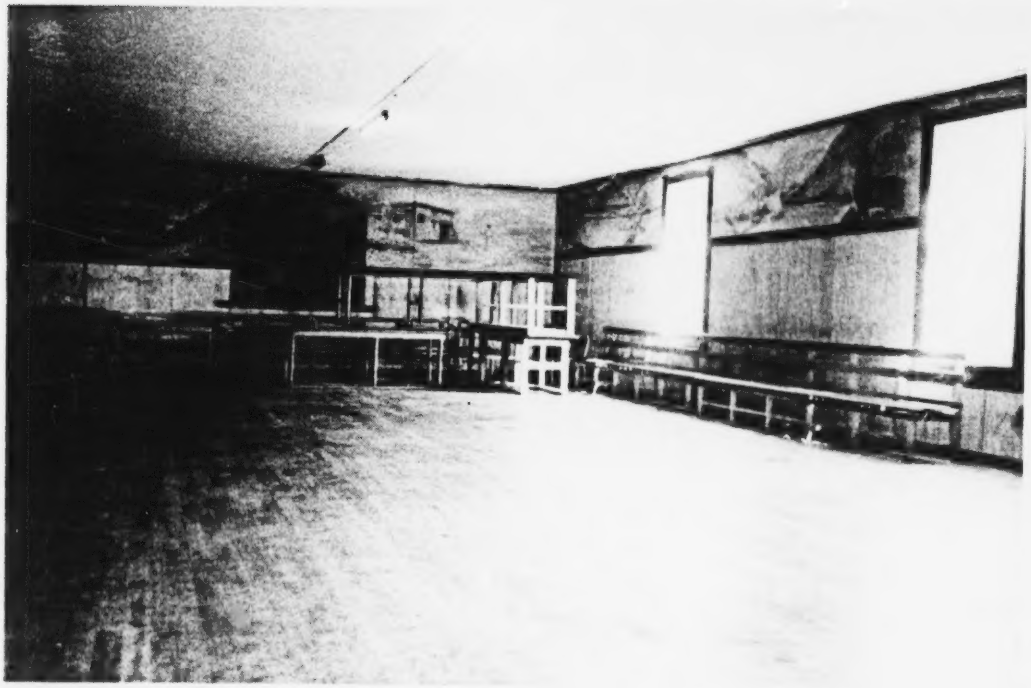
> ***"Fog at first but cleared quickly and turned cold. A large number of under-threes but these were well supervised."***

CANVASTOWN: THURSDAY AFTERNOON, 28 APRIL 1988

Between the morning session at Rai Valley and the afternoon session at Canvastown the teachers - and the researcher - were invited to a parent's home for lunch. After an enjoyable lunch and conversation the teachers drove to Canvastown, arriving there shortly before 1pm - a little late due to the 'home visit'. The distance between Rai Valley and Canvastown via the Pelorus River bridge was not great, about a 15 minute drive or 18 kilometres in all.

Canvastown, at the head of the Wakamarina Valley, was originally exactly that: it sprang up almost overnight when gold was found in 1864 and thousands of hopeful goldminers converged upon the area, using canvas tents as their means of shelter. The present-day Canvastown is a very small rural settlement, consisting of little more than a hotel and a few houses.

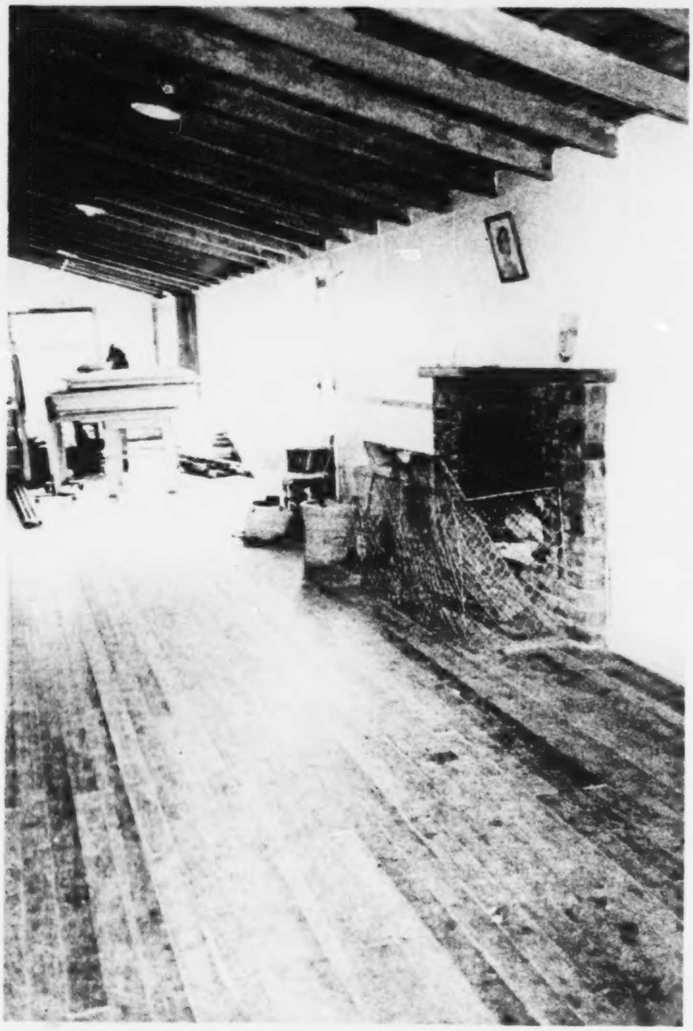
The hall used by the Canvastown group



Inside the main hall at Canvastown

Facilities Available to the Canvastown Group

The Canvastown group met in a community hall, very dark and old. The main hall, which had large murals depicting early settler days on all four walls, was only used by the group when the weather was too cold or wet to go outside and the children needed space in which to exercise. Because the Canvastown group was very small, the teachers felt that the hall was far too big and cold for them to feel comfortable in. Instead, the group customarily used the long, narrow room adjoining the kitchen (although on this particular occasion, renovations were taking place and there were stacks of timber and tools scattered about). The group had once used the fireplace in this room but did not do so any longer. They had found that it was not worth the effort of lighting it: by the time the room began to warm up, it was almost time for the session to end. The group had therefore invested in electric heaters instead.



Part of the room normally used during sessions at Canvastown

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The outdoor play area consisted of a sizeable fenced-off area of grass, immediately outside the main entrance to the hall. There were two swings and a slide and, propped against the hall, some old tractor tyres. The teachers reported that, some months earlier, local parents had dug up the entire play area with the idea of levelling it off so that it would be easier for the children to work and play there. Delays in completing the levelling-off process, together with the mandatory waiting period while newly-sown grass becomes established, meant that a substantial amount of time went by when the children were not able to use the outdoor play area at all. The session being reported on here was the first opportunity the group had had to venture onto the re-sown grass (and accompanying weeds) since the project had begun. The view from the outdoor area was both attractive and unmistakeably rural; it took in paddocks winding their way down the Wakamarina Valley, stock, and pine-tree-covered hills.

The Session

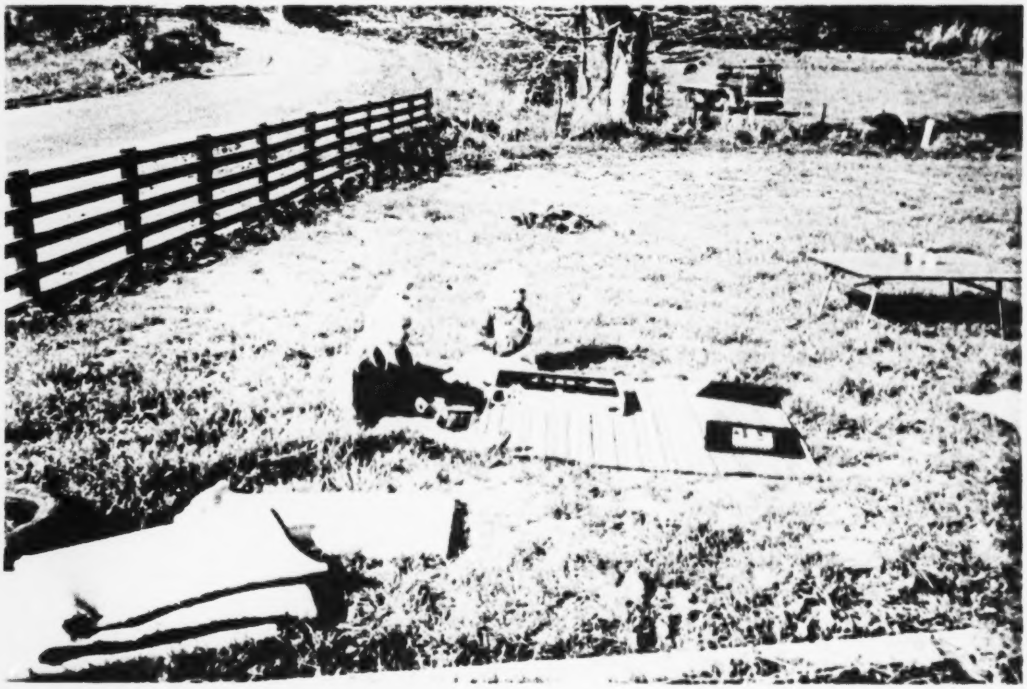
As it was a beautifully sunny and calm afternoon, making it much warmer outside than inside the hall, the teachers elected to set up all activities and equipment out on the grass. This was also a way of celebrating the group being able to use the outdoor play area once more. The only drawback was the number of sand-flies hovering about, only too ready to bite.

Mats were spread on the grass for the children to sit on while looking at books and working with puzzles, a board game rather like checkers, and the set of Duplo. Also available for the children were paper and crayons, a painting easel, paper, brushes and paints, the dough table, finger painting on another table, and the two new mice from the colony at Rai Valley school. Unpacking and setting up took a maximum of only five minutes.

The Canvastown group was very small, with only four children of enrolled age - all over the age of four years - as regular attenders. All four children were girls; there had been a boy as well but he had very recently celebrated his fifth birthday and gone on to school. At this session, however, the number of children present was six instead of four. This was because a woman on holiday from Christchurch and staying with friends in the area had come along to observe, bringing her three-year-old daughter and baby along too. The baby slept much of the time but the little girl joined in with whatever the older children were doing and seemed to enjoy herself very much.

The four regularly attending children appeared to know each other well (although, for the most part, they probably only met during mobile unit session times) and were eager to work, play, and chat together.

The outdoor area, Canvastown



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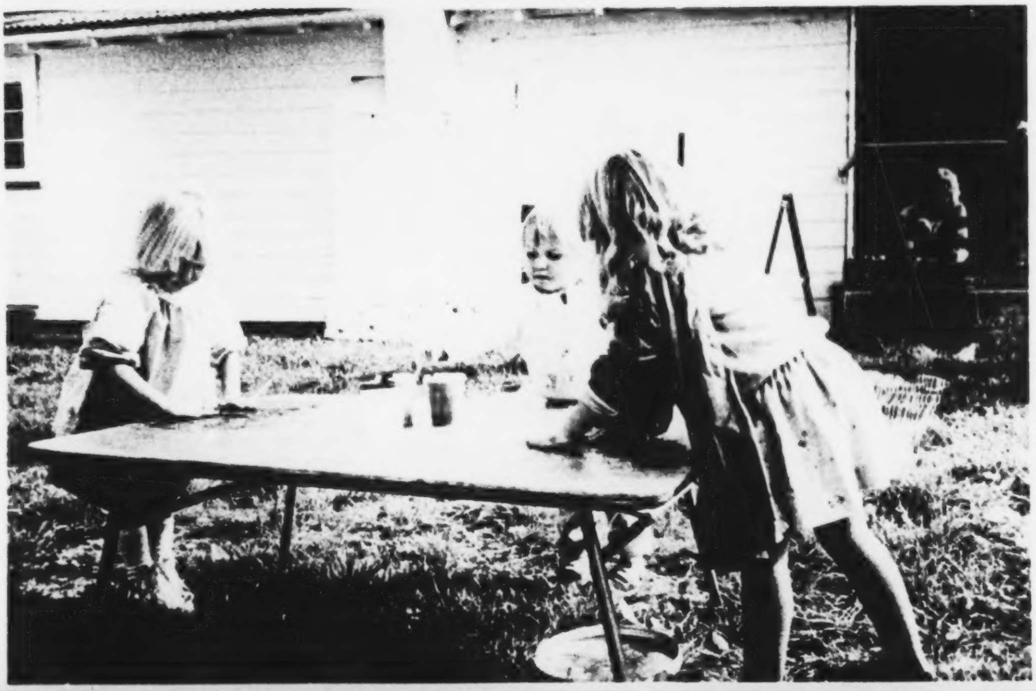
Marlborough Mobile Pre-School Unit

At the beginning of the session all five girls were lifted over the wire fence into the playing area by the adults; they were then left for about half-an-hour to spend their time as they chose without adult intervention. This they were happy to do. During this period all five parents present at that stage (including the visitor) sat with the teachers on the steps of the hall and chatted about local events and other items of interest. (There was, as well, a brief discussion about committee-related business.) At the end of the half hour, two parents then left to fulfil commitments elsewhere.

While the remaining three parents continued chatting together and keeping a general eye on the children (sometimes also answering questions when their child wandered over to talk to them from time to time) the teachers divided their time between the various activities. The head teacher, for example, interacted with the children when they were doing finger painting, encouraging them to try new ways of approaching the task and engaging them in general conversation (one such conversation arose from a child - an 'only child' - asking why the visiting baby had no teeth); she also showed the visiting child, who had never experienced finger painting before, how to go about it. The other teacher spent 10 minutes or more talking with all five girls about the two mice. After impressing upon the group the relative fragility of such little creatures, she let each child handle the mice, and explained what mice like to eat.

Looking at the mice, Canvastown

Preparing to finger paint, Canvastown

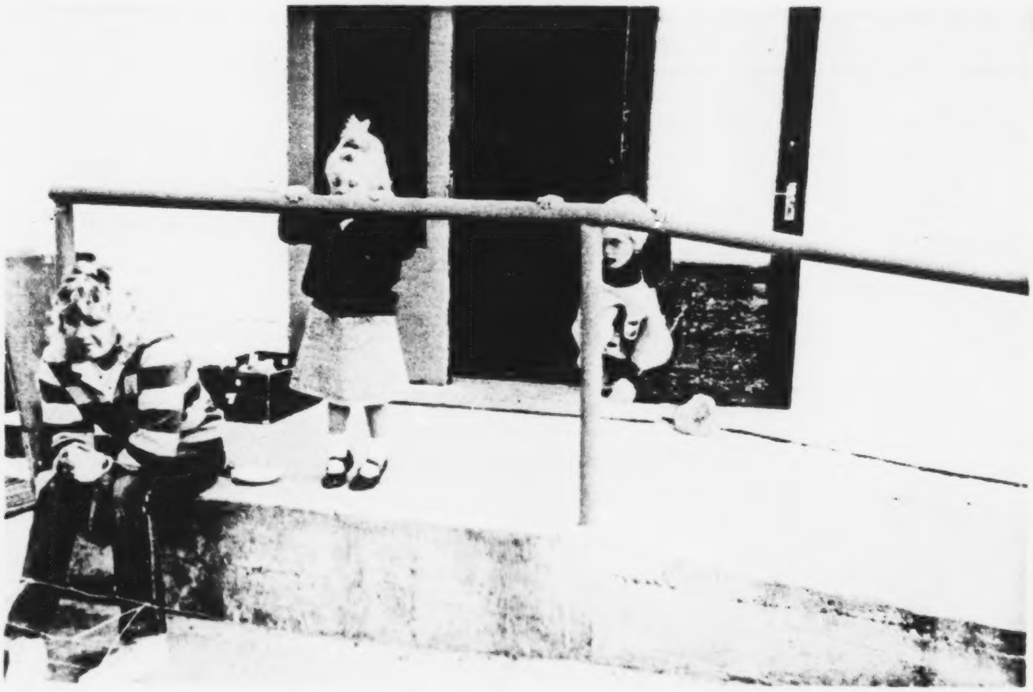


Finger painting in progress, Canvastown

The teacher also explained how important it was for the children not to put their hands in or near their mouths until they had had a chance to wash them after handling the mice. Further discussion covered the fact that the mice were albino, and the implications and signs of this. A large spider running through the grass also prompted a spontaneous mini-lesson on the characteristics and habits of spiders in general.

The visiting parent read a story to her own child together with two of the other children. Of the three parents who remained throughout the session she was the only one who really worked or interacted with the children.

Around 2.15pm, orange juice was brought out; the children came and helped themselves if or when they wanted to. One of the teachers stayed nearby to hand out mugs and help pour when necessary. As well as the other activities mentioned above, the children spent time at the dough table and each painted a picture. (These were hung over the fence to dry.) Children also chose a library book to take home with them.



An idle moment following the afternoon break, Canvastown

One child asked if she and the others could do some baking - a reportedly popular activity amongst children at all of the groups visited by the mobile unit - but as the teachers had not brought necessary ingredients and utensils in the van with them, child and teachers agreed to do this activity the following week instead. Mat-time was held in the last quarter of an hour, during which time one of the teachers read a story and led the group in singing and performing action songs (eg 'Hickory-Dickory-Dock'). After pretending to be teddy bears, all five children and the teacher then had a general discussion about what everybody had been doing since last session (or, in the case of the visiting child, since coming to Canvastown.) The session drew to a close at 3pm with everybody - including the children - helping to pack up. Before starting on the drive back to Blenheim, the teachers spent a few more minutes chatting to parents who came to collect their children.

The session was a very relaxed and pleasant social occasion for everybody present. The four local girls clearly thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to be together (there was much giggling and chattering together) and, from the children's point of view especially, visits from the mobile unit were of continuing value. (This was something of a dilemma for the teachers who, as explained in the introductory pages to this case study, felt that their time and resources would be better used if they began visits to an area where there were greater numbers of children without access to pre-school education. They felt that the families from the Canvastown group could then join the Rai Valley group which, although it would mean a longer trip for parents, was not too far away to be out of the question.)

Comments from the Teacher Diaries

Main activities involved in:

> ***"Puzzles and cutting [at collage table]. The time for these was really rewarding."***
>
> ***"Individual help able to be given on a one-to-one ratio today!"***

Other comments:

> ***"A small group which is quiet and busy. It was a really enjoyable session."***
>
> ***"A small group attends here. We have a really good rapport with this group, both children and parents!"***

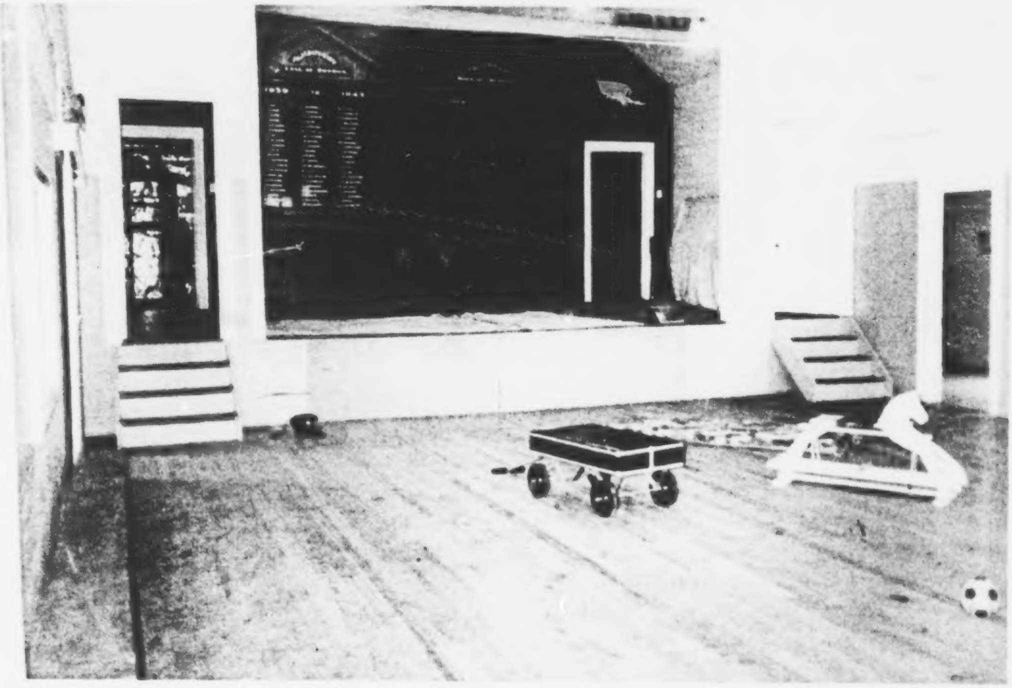
WARD: FRIDAY MORNING, 29 APRIL 1988

Ward, another small community, was the location of the last child-contact session held each week by the Marlborough mobile pre-school unit. Situated 50 kilometres from Blenheim on the main highway south (via the Kaikoura coast) it was the most distant venue visited by the mobile unit.

Facilities Available to the Ward Group

The Ward group met in the local war memorial hall, an old, wooden building incorporating a large main hall, a kitchen and supper room.

The recently painted main hall had a white ceiling and olive-drab walls. The curtains were of white and brown patterned fabric. On the wall behind the stage, against a maroon back-drop, was a 'Roll of Honour' listing the names of those lost in the 1914-18 and 1939-45 World Wars. Apart from some wooden bench seats arranged around the perimeter of the hall, the room was bare. The lack of furniture and the wooden floor caused voices to echo. As well, the hall smelled rather musty and, heightened by the dull, overcast weather, seemed vast, gloomy, and cold.



Interior view of the Ward Town Hall

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WARD TOWN HALL

The hall where the Ward group met

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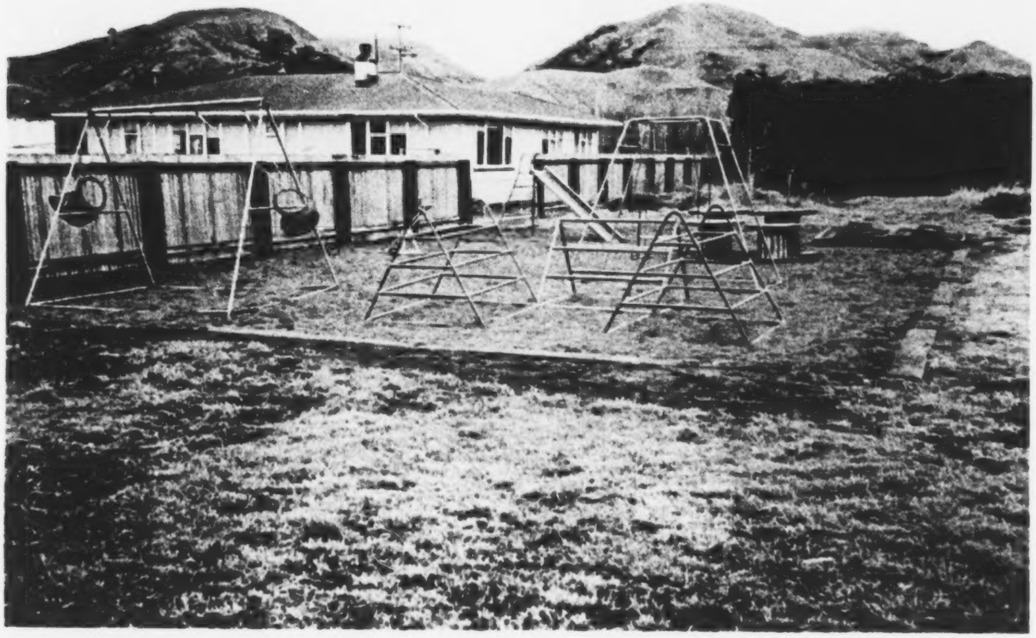
The large kitchen opened off the generously-proportioned entrance-way to the hall which, in turn, led to the supper room, a long, narrow apartment. As well as a door to the kitchen, the supper room had a second door leading directly into the main hall. The supper room, being much smaller and easier to heat (there were electric heaters mounted on the walls well out the children's reach) than the main hall, seemed a much more cosy and compatible environment in which to work with pre-schoolers. For this reason, the teachers always set up indoor activities and held mat-times in this area. The main hall was therefore mainly devoted to more physically active pursuits (eg using the trolley and the crawl tunnel, playing chase) although, weather permitting, children generally preferred to go outside for these purposes rather than use the hall.

Children and teacher at the dough table, Ward. (The view is of the supper room as seen from the connecting door into the main hall.)

The supper room used by the mobile pre-school group was due for renovation. The local community had raised funds so that the room could be widened by two to three metres and floor to ceiling windows or french doors installed on the outer wall. (The expected cost was around $30,000.) The teachers, and parents from this group, were looking forward to the time when the proposed alterations were completed because not only would they have more room in which to work, but the new windows would ensure that more sun reached their work-space making it both lighter and warmer. In addition, the extra space would mean that they could display children's art work on the walls and leave some equipment out between sessions, thereby helping to reduce time and effort taken to set up each week.

Two small rooms situated on either side of the stage in the main hall were used by the group to store some of its belongings. These included a trolley, rocking horse, telephones, collage materials, a mattress, some tables and chairs, the wall-hanging with pockets for the children's belongings, and mats used for gymnastics.

The outdoor facilities available to the group included an unfenced area of grass around the hall (lack of fencing was not so crucial because the hall was situated down a small side road of its own, well away from traffic) and a variety of metal climbing frames, plus swings surrounded by sand. (The teachers had tried to convince local parents to use wood chips which they knew to be much safer, but the community had been given a big load of sand free of charge and they chose to use that instead.)



Outdoor play area, Ward. (Private house in background.)

The Session

After filling the van with petrol, the teachers left Blenheim around 8.40am, arriving at Ward at 9.25am. (The relieving teacher who had worked earlier in the week was present again today; the head teacher had had to attend a senior teachers' meeting in Wellington.) The trip took longer than usual because of having to travel behind a slow truck for much of the distance; the road made passing impossible.

As the morning was cold and overcast, with a persistent drizzle, the entire session took place inside. The parent on duty had already unlocked the hall when the teachers arrived and begun initial setting up from the group's own store of equipment. Several parents helped teachers carry equipment inside from the van.

In the supper room, the teachers set out dough, cutters and rolling pins on one table, with the oven in which to cook dough cakes nearby. They also put out pieces of multi-coloured and multi-textured materials, cardboard boxes, bottletops, straws, glue, paint, scissors, and sellotape for collage work on another table. A corner of the room was established as the book area, while puzzles were placed on a mat on the floor nearby. As well, two painting easels were erected. Finger painting, however, was not made available at this session as the teachers felt sure that the children would be reluctant to put their hands into a cold, wet mixture on such a chilly day.

Because outdoor play was out of the question and the small room was likely to become overcrowded, the main hall was used more than usual at this session. The teachers therefore put out the mobile unit's large box of Duplo (multi-coloured blocks which could be fitted onto a board in various patterns or designs) on a mat in one corner of the hall, and a set of large, wooden blocks on a mat in another corner. Also available in the hall were a trolley (which belonged specifically to the Ward group), a rocking horse, a further selection of books placed on a mattress, the crawl tunnel and a thick mat to cushion the impact should any child fall, the set of straws which could be fitted together in various formations, and some telephones. The two mice in their little house were also brought out of the van and placed on the stage. (The regular teacher commented that children at this group were very active physically and in good weather would spend most of their time outside. She said it was therefore very important to have equipment such as the crawl tunnel and trolley available in wet weather so that they - especially several "very boisterous boys" - still had scope for physical activity inside.)

Marlborough Mobile Pre-School Unit

The session was predominantly free play with both teachers and some parents working with or encouraging children as they felt was appropriate. One of the teachers helped a child write his own name; the other spent several minutes with each of two children going through their homework scrapbooks.

All 12 children of enrolled age who were present completed a painting (these were placed on the stage to dry) and/or some collage work. (One boy, whose fifth birthday it was, with some teacher help made a 'birthday cake' out of cardboard boxes, paint, and decorative items. This process was eagerly watched by a group of other children and some parents as well.) At various times, individual children also took part in most of the other activities which were available. Two children, for example, spent several minutes talking on the telephones. (The telephones, one of which was placed in the small storage room to the left of the stage and the other in the room to the right, actually rang, and were somehow linked so that the children, in different rooms, could talk and listen to one another on them.) One child seemed to prefer to work alone with the set of Duplo (another child joined him briefly but did not linger) while four children played cooperatively with the trolley, alternately giving and receiving rides. Another small group played in the crawl tunnel, while others worked alongside their peers and teachers and/or parents on dough play and puzzles. One of the teachers read stories to three or four children on two different occasions while the other discussed the mice with another small group. These children all took turns handling the mice before being sent to wash their hands. (Separate male and female toilet facilities were located to one side of the entrance-way to the hall). During the morning, a teacher also spent 10 minutes or so teaching five or six children how to play 'Punchinella'; she then ran through a number of action songs the group had encountered at previous sessions. While some children remembered what to do, others had to have their memories refreshed. (The teacher remarked that it was sometimes frustrating trying to build on activities undertaken in previous weeks because, with seeing groups only once a week, the children not infrequently forgot what they had learnt, making it slower for them to acquire some skills than would be the case if they attended every day.)

Working with the set of Duplo blocks, Ward

In the main hall, Ward

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At 10.10am all the children gathered in the supper room for morning tea. As there was a birthday 'shout', the parent of the child celebrating his fifth birthday provided sandwiches and 'animal biscuits' for the children's consumption. There were also glasses of fruit juice or flavoured milk to choose from. Most parents had had a cup of tea on arrival at the hall but a few had a second cup while the children were having their drink. Everybody returned to activities of their choice after the break. A popular activity facilitated by one of the teachers was play centred on the crawl tunnel. After explaining that the children - never fewer than five or six at any given time - must never jump **on** the crawl tunnel, the teacher showed them how to take turns to crawl through it. This was then extended to children completing forward rolls on the mat as they emerged from the tunnel. The children standing in line for a turn sang songs as they waited; there was much laughing as well and racing to get back in line for another turn.

Tidy-up time was at approximately 11.15am. The children took full part in this process with the teachers alternately praising them for their help and instructing them what to do. Mat-time began at 11.23am and continued until the session ended at 11.37am. During mat-time, candles were lit for the birthday child while the group sang the 'Happy Birthday' and 'Happy School-days' songs, followed by 'Old MacDonald's Farm', the song requested by the five-year-old. There was group discussion about what going to school could be like and, finally, a story about 'Corduroy the Bear'. The session was relaxed but busy.

Parents

Five parents (all women) remained throughout the session (one had brought her baby along) while three were present for shorter periods. Several others also lingered to chat for several minutes at the beginning and end of the session.

Most parents present helped the teachers and the parent on duty with unpacking and repacking the van and with other housekeeping tasks. Although parents spent most of their time (mostly while in the kitchen) chatting amongst themselves and to the teachers (especially the one they knew best) five were observed to involve themselves with children from time to time. For example, one woman interacted with a small group working at the dough table while two others sat beside children doing puzzles and looking at books, occasionally offering advice or comments. The mother of one of the shyer children seemed to prefer to stay close to her child throughout the morning while another concerned, and perhaps over-anxious, parent was heard to say to her daughter that "you must do a painting today". Despite their obvious enjoyment at having the opportunity to meet and talk together the parents were nevertheless conscientious about overseeing their children, allowing the teachers more concentrated time with individual children and small groups.

One of the parents mentioned to the researcher how much she and others in the group appreciated the visits of the mobile unit but was worried enough to ask: "... the government isn't going to close the unit is it?"

Comments from the Teacher Diaries

Main activities involved in:

> ***"Mat-time - we had Maori songs and story-time - a wonderful response from the group."***

> ***"A mixture of inside/outside duties and trying to develop individual children's skills."***

Best/worst aspects of session:

> ***"The best part of the session was spending time with children doing puzzles. Also there were lots of children despite it being such a cold day. The worst thing was having to work in the cold main hall - instead of our warm area [the supper room] - because of the renovations which are happening. The carpenters' noise was also distracting."***

ADMINISTRATION SESSION AT BASE: FRIDAY AFTERNOON, 29 APRIL 1988

The main activity for the teachers during the afternoon was checking, cataloguing, and repairing the mobile unit's large supply of library books. The teachers also cleaned and tidied the van, cleaned the mice's cage and replenished their food and water, checked puzzles for missing parts and chose some different ones for the following week, and purchased some linseed oil for use with the Havelock group on Monday afternoon.

Comments from the Teacher Diaries

> ***"We had a long meeting today with the Association Executive to discuss the mobile unit's timetable and guidelines."***

LINKWATER: MONDAY MORNING, 2 MAY 1988

After a very scenic 45 minute drive via a steep and winding hill road beyond Havelock, the teachers (and the researcher) arrived at Linkwater at 9.25am. Linkwater is a small settlement in the Pelorus district, serving not only the farming community, but holiday-makers as well. A proportion of its population is also connected with the Outward Bound school at nearby Anakiwa.

Facilities Available to the Linkwater Group

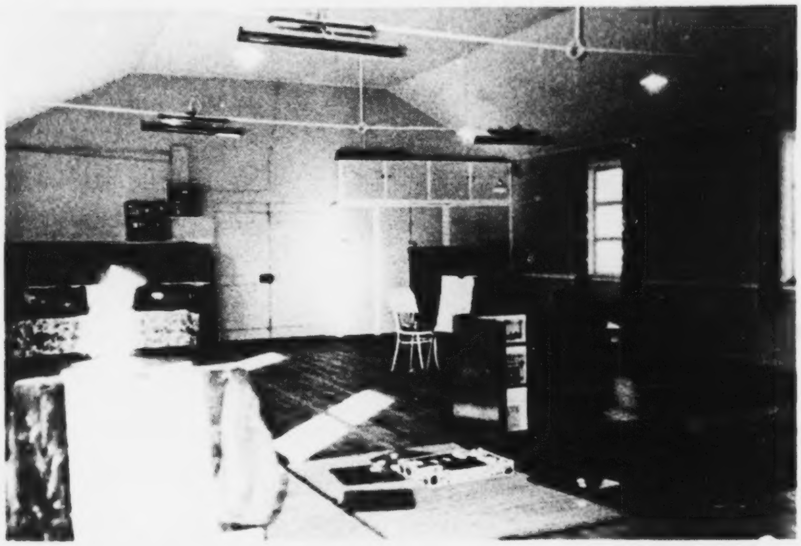
The Linkwater group met in the local community hall, a large, old wooden building of rather grim appearance. The group entered the hall through the kitchen which seemed a much friendlier and accessible route to use than the main entrance at the front of the hall. The teachers were able to drive the van close to the kitchen entrance; parents, however, left their cars out in front of the property, well away from where the children played.

Despite its outward appearance, the interior of the hall was pleasant. It was painted in shades of green, white, and cream. The paint work was in good repair and the effect was clean and neat. The floor was wooden. Other than a war memorial 'Roll of Honour' on one wall, orange, white, and brown curtains, a wooden bench seat, and a piano, there was very little in the hall. (A large storeroom at the rear of the building contained chairs which were brought out for community events as required.) The hall was heated by means of several electric heaters attached to metal bars criss-crossing the ceiling.

The sloping area of grass along one side of the hall containing sandpit and swings represented the outside play area available to the children. Bordering this area was the back-yard of the local school teacher's house. The teacher kept a pig, which could be heard giving voice from time to time, and some hens; the hens were busily employed scratching about in the grass on their own side of the fence. There was a very attractive view of bush-covered hills beyond the hall.

LINKWATER
MEMORIAL HALL.

The Linkwater Memorial Hall



Interior view of the Linkwater venue

A section of the outdoor area, Linkwater

The Session

Several parents and their children were already at the venue when the teachers arrived. While the children played together, the parents had unlocked the building and brought in three child-sized tables and a number of chairs from the storeroom behind the hall and set them up. The teachers remarked that they were always very grateful to have this preliminary work done as it greatly facilitated their getting the session underway. As well as the tables and chairs, the teachers also put some mats around inside the hall, together with the fold-up book-corner, two painting easels, the dough table, the set of Duplo blocks, and the finger painting activity. (A dolls' cradle and dolls and some dressing-up clothes belonging to the group were also available but none of the children chose to use them at this session.)

The 'special activity' for the morning was finger painting, but it was finger painting with a difference. Instead of the usual mixture made with cornflour, water, and food colouring the teachers thought that it would be interesting for the children to try it with instant pudding mix. The teachers therefore showed the children how to measure the required amount of milk (which they purchased on the way out to Linkwater) into a bowl and then how to whip it up with an egg beater until it reached the desired thickness. The idea was for the children to then tip the pudding out onto the table and proceed with finger painting in the usual way. However, the children did not like the idea - perhaps because they had been so well socialised at home **not** to put their hands into food and make a mess with it - and could not be persuaded to finger paint. The result was that the teachers fetched bowls and spoons and let the children eat the mixture instead; successive small groups of children did this with evident pleasure. (Each group, in turn, first went through the steps of listening to the teachers read the instructions on the packet, measuring the milk, and beating the mixture.)

Although there had been a heavy frost and the usual thick mist blanketed much of the road between Blenheim and Havelock, it was a beautifully calm and sunny day at Linkwater. Once every child had had a turn at finger painting, to take advantage of the weather most chose to spend the majority of their time outside (although a few children went to and fro between the indoor and outdoor areas throughout the morning, completing paintings, working with the dough, and making 'teddy bears' - with teacher assistance - using a variety of materials from the collage table.) Outside, the children divided their time between the sandpit, swings and crawl tunnel, working with the large wooden blocks set out on a mat on the grass, listening to stories read by one or other of the teachers, and talking with one or more of the adults (whether parent or teacher). The school teacher's wife next door, trying to get a very battered and noisy old car to start, created a diversion for the group for a

Finger painting with instant pudding mix, Linkwater

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period. Six children from the nearby primary school, visiting during their morning break, were another diversion. (The teachers reported that younger school children regularly visited during sessions, with their teacher sometimes coming along as well.) They enthusiastically joined in with ongoing activities such as listening to a story and playing in the sandpit. The pre-schoolers seemed to find the school children a source of great interest.

After washing their hands, the children (eight of whom were of enrolled age and four younger) were called inside to have their morning tea together. The parent on duty had prepared cheese and crackers, apple, and cold Milo for their refreshment. Both teachers and a couple of the parents supervised while having their own drink (and the biscuits which one of the parents had brought along for the adults); the other parents present had their morning tea while chatting together in the kitchen.

Once they had eaten and had a drink, the children returned to outside play. While most played in the sandpit until the final mat-time (some becoming so excited at one point that they had to be admonished **not** to throw sand) a small group asked to look at the mice and spent several minutes discussing them. The teachers also spent time with the two babies and toddlers at the session, sometimes hugging and talking to them and at other times carrying them around as they moved about amongst the older children. One child became tired and began to cry and the head teacher spent several minutes with her on her lap, comforting her. (Her mother had just been stung by a wasp and was unable to attend to her child herself.)

Shortly after morning tea, a public health nurse visited the group. She spent half-an-hour or so talking with any parents who had queries about their families' health; she also weighed and measured two babies. (The teachers encouraged the public health nurse to drop into sessions whenever she could. They also organised - in collaboration with the public health nurse and staff at the local school - video showings on health and child development-related matters whenever feasible. These were usually shown at the school - which the principal was happy to allow - during session times.)

Mat-time, during which the children performed action songs and listened to the story of 'Corduroy the Bear', brought the session to a close shortly before 11.45am.

The children were kept occupied throughout the session with the available activities and equipment and there seemed to be a good balance between children having space to interact with their peers without adult involvement and teachers either facilitating play with small groups or interacting on a one-to-one basis with children (for example, when going through the homework scrapbooks with four of the older children). Throughout the session, the teachers were also able to spend quality time with parents.

Parents

Eight parents remained throughout the session. These included a visitor to the area (accompanied by her baby, older pre-schooler and eight year old daughter - the latter spent her time looking after her baby sister and observing proceedings) and a father of one of the children.

Apart from preparing the morning tea for both children and adults and helping to set up the session and pack up again at the end, most parents spent almost all their time talking with one another, to the teachers, and to the public health nurse. Topics covered included mobile unit matters such as an impending committee meeting and discussion of more personal concerns as well as casual conversation. Some of the parents expressed an interest in the study and asked the researcher questions. All these parents were quick to emphasise how valuable they regarded the mobile unit to be, as much for themselves as for their children, and were only sorry that they could not have more visits from the unit each week (especially when they had to miss sessions due to public holidays which fell on a Monday). They expressed the hope that there would be no cutbacks to the mobile pre-school unit service.

As this was the last session before the two-week May vacation, the teachers were not lending out the mobile unit's library books, preferring to take them all in, in order to do a 'stocktaking'. Although they understood the reason, two parents were heard to say to one another that they wished they could borrow books as usual as they found it such a valuable service both because they lived in an isolated community with limited resources and because the cost of buying quality books was beyond their means.

The father present throughout the morning was the only parent to work **extensively** with the children; he spent most of the time in the sandpit with his son and a group of other children; he also pushed a child on the swing and interacted with children working with dough and with the box of Duplo. However, two or three other parents also pushed children on the swings at various intervals, one woman helped and encouraged her child to paint letters of the alphabet in lieu of a picture, while another read her daughter a story (although, as she read it so fast and without expression, it is doubtful whether the child would have learned much about the story; she nevertheless appeared to be interested).

Interaction between parents, and between teachers and parents, was friendly and relaxed throughout.

Comments from the Teacher Diaries

Main activities involved in:

> ***"Talking to visitors and parents. Working with and supervision of younger children. Most sessions are floating supervision and this was no exception."***
>
> ***"Liaising with neighbouring school teacher and his children [ie pupils]. A mixture of inside/outside supervision."***

Best/worst aspects of session:

> ***"The worst thing was the lack of parent help today. The best thing was making good use of the fantastic weather and being able to set up an obstacle course for the children outside."***

Other comments:

> ***"More under-threes than kindergarten-aged children. Some of our bigger, older children were absent today which affects the session."***

HAVELOCK: MONDAY AFTERNOON, 2 MAY 1988

After leaving Linkwater, and before going to the Sea Scouts Hall where the Havelock group met, the teachers called into the Havelock primary school to have lunch with the teachers there. Although the reason for their visit on this occasion was to talk specifically to one of the teachers - also a parent of a pre-schooler who attended the Havelock group - about a forthcoming kindergarten association committee meeting, the mobile teachers liked to maintain close communication with the school. During lunch the school principal and some of the teachers commented to the researcher that they felt that the mobile pre-school unit was a positive asset for the community and fulfilled a great need. They expressed the view that the presence of trained teachers at play groups had a "motivating effect" on parents and avoided the possible problem of "in-fighting" between different groups of parents when they could not or would not agree about ways to run a group. The principal remarked, too, that the mobile unit gave local pre-school children access to books that they would not otherwise have.

The teachers arrived at the Sea Scouts Hall shortly after 1pm to find that several parents had the session well underway; they had put out equipment (such as collage materials, painting easel and so on) from the group's own supplies ready for the children to use. They had also erected the portable wire fence to enable the children to play safely outside.

According to the teachers, the parents and children who came to the Monday and Wednesday sessions at Havelock were often different, that is some families chose to attend one session or the other rather than attend both. While there was no set 'rule', more children under three years of age customarily attended the Monday afternoon session than attended on Wednesday mornings. At this particular session there were a total of 11 children present; included in this number were three toddlers, a baby, and seven children aged three or more years.

The Session

The teachers, upon arrival, to supplement what the parents had put out inside, set up the dough table and oven and put out books on a mat in one corner. They also arranged the mattress for the children to jump on.

Outside, as well as the box of toys and implements for using in the sandpit, there was the crawl tunnel and the three large wooden 'boxes' (see description of the Wednesday session at Havelock) which were placed together in such a way that they doubled as a hut and as a base for climbing and jumping purposes. A variety of toys suitable for babies and toddlers was also placed on a rug near to where the parents established themselves a little later on.

Children were free to come and go between the indoor and outdoor areas as they chose but as it was a sunny, calm afternoon - the hall seemed dark and cold by comparison - most of the group remained outside for much of the afternoon.

The teachers had chosen to make linseeding of wooden blocks and toys the 'special activity' of the session. Child-sized tables and chairs were therefore set up outside in the sun, together with bowls of linseed oil, cloths, and the wooden items that required coating. (The teachers felt that this activity would serve the joint purpose of involving the children in learning something a bit different and would also ensure that the equipment was maintained in good order.)

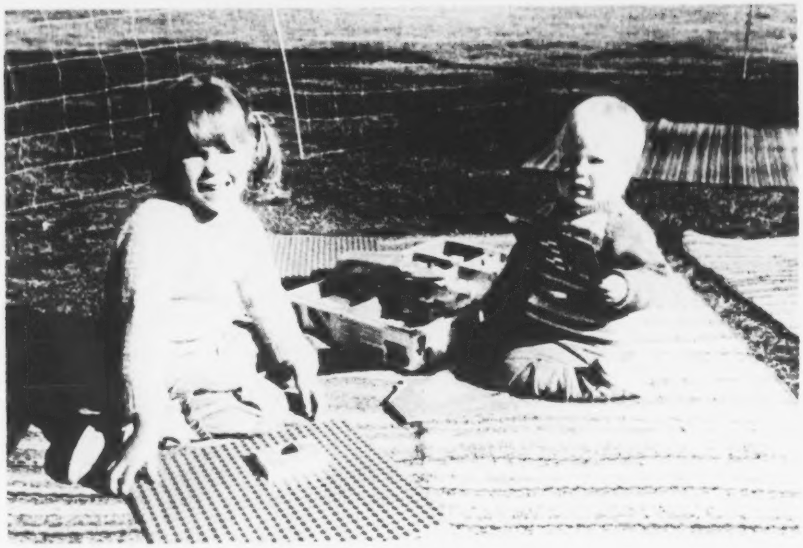
The 'linseeding' activity, Havelock

Five or six of the older children, under the guidance of one of the teachers, enthusiastically embarked upon the linseeding project as soon as it was explained what they had to do. (The teacher also took the opportunity to talk about shapes and the concepts of 'big', 'little' and 'middle-sized' while assigning blocks to each child to work on.) With some coming and going, the children's enthusiasm lasted about 20 minutes after which time they abandoned the task to the adults and went on to other activities. Throughout much of the remainder of the session, five parents and a teacher sat together at the (child-sized) tables in the sun and chatted together while continuing to coat the toys with linseed.

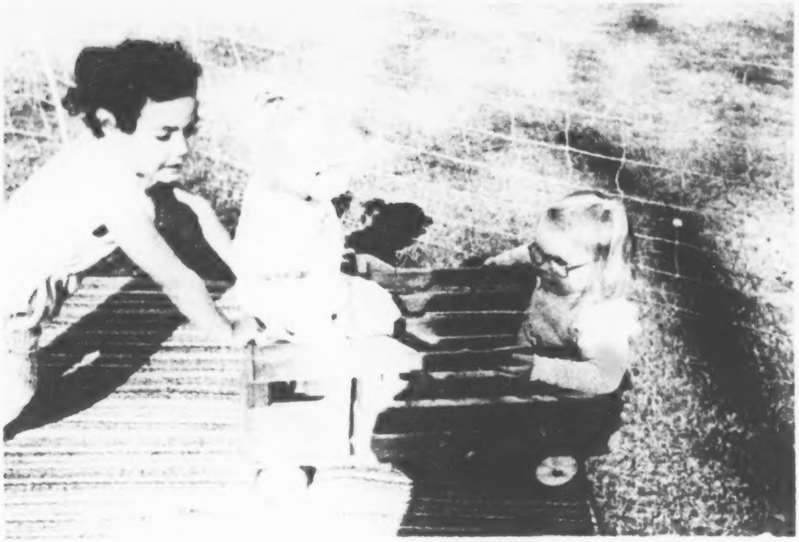
The parent on duty prepared fruit juice and pieces of apple for the children; these were put out on a table inside just after 2pm and the children were invited to go and help themselves. Unlike at the Wednesday morning session at Havelock, the break was not a 'formal' affair with everyone gathering as a group.

As well as the linseeding activity, dough play, and working in the sandpit, children were observed to play in the crawl tunnel and in the hut, complete paintings, and give each other rides in a big wooden truck. One little boy played with the telephone while two girls dressed up and pretended to cook a meal for a dinner party. All but one or two children also played a 'Jack-in-the-Box' game with one of the teachers which, judging by the chattering and laughing, was greatly enjoyed by all participants.

Mat-time, led by the head teacher while the other teacher helped parents tidy up, began at 2.34pm. During the 11 minutes which remained before the session ended, the group performed action songs, discussed the recent teddy bears' picnic that they had attended, and listened to a story. While the others listened, each of the (enrolled) children then took turns to have a short conversation with the teachers about what they had been doing since the last session. The group was given the opportunity to comment after each child had had his or her say. The teacher then explained that there would be no kindergarten for the next two weeks because of the May holidays. She also explained why it was not possible for anyone to borrow the mobile unit's library books over the holiday period. The children were reminded to collect their belongings from their 'lockers' before leaving with their parents. Following these instructions, the group played the 'Jack-in-the-Box' game they had played earlier; as before, this proved a great success and there was much joyful screaming as the game proceeded. The teacher brought mat-time to a close by having the children do some stretching and breathing exercises aimed at quietening and relaxing the children after the boisterous Jack-in-the-Box activity.



Using the Duplo set, Havelock



Cooperative play, Havelock

One child (a boy) remained in the sandpit for almost the entire session; the exception was a brief period when he coated some blocks with linseed at the teachers' invitation. When it came to mat-time he protested vociferously when asked to join the others. The teachers prevailed, however, and he did sit with the group, even taking part when it was his turn to do so. The teachers stated that they made a point of ensuring that all children of enrolled age (younger children could please themselves) learned to take part in mat-time with the rest of the group.

Parents

Eight parents remained throughout the session. The parents had very little interaction with the children at this session, other than general supervision and brief interchanges with some of the younger children who liked to keep regular checks on their mothers' whereabouts.

As already mentioned, several parents helped with the linseeding activity throughout the afternoon while chatting with the teacher who sat with them. As well, three or four parents took time to complete one of the parent questionnaires for this study which had just been handed out. (One woman teased the teachers about their part in the study.)

Two parents, on separate occasions, spent lengthy periods (five or more minutes) with the other teacher talking to her about what were obviously private, personal or family concerns. Another parent and this same teacher also devoted five or so minutes to going through the group's accounts.

While six of the eight parents spent most of their time enjoying the chance to 'socialise' together outside in the sun, two other parents spent almost all of their time inside. They were both expecting babies in the near future and seemed very shy. They talked together a little but for the most part appeared content to look at the magazines which were available for parents.

Parents (and others) coating wooden toys with linseed oil, Havelock

Parents at Havelock about to complete questionnaires for the study

Comments from the Teacher Diaries

Main activities involved in:

> ***"Outside construction of see-saw, cart and bus using cardboard boxes/reels. Both staff go where the needs are."***

> ***"Both staff rotated inside and outside all session. Involved in carpentry and manipulative skills with small groups of children."***

Best/worst aspects of session:

> ***"[The best aspect was] the cooperative play amongst some children which is just beginning. [The worst was that] this is our coldest venue so when the sun goes down it finishes any good outside activity."***

Other comments:

> ***"The attendance was down a bit for no apparent reason. Usually winter-time does have this effect but today was so mild."***

> ***"A good, well-worthwhile afternoon with plenty of one-to-one interaction and work with small groups. Most enjoyable."***

WAIRAU VALLEY: TUESDAY MORNING, 3 MAY 1988

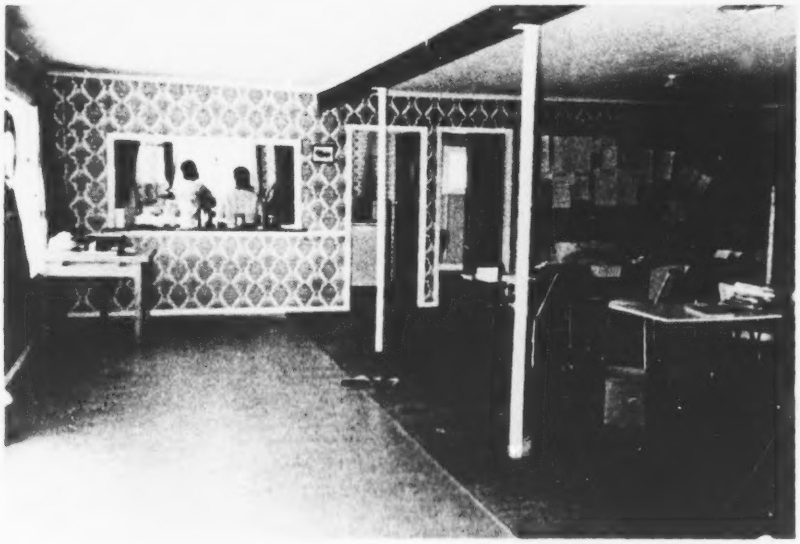
The teachers left Blenheim at 8.55am to drive the 41 kilometres through rolling farmland to the Wairau Valley, situated west of Blenheim. They reached the venue shortly after 9.20am, having stopped en route to buy some milk to use during the session.

The Wairau Valley was predominantly a farming community but some of those who lived in the area were connected with the airforce base near Blenheim while others were employed in a local trucking firm. Two of the parents associated with the group were local primary school teachers. (The primary school was situated close to where the mobile unit group met which made it easy for the group to visit there on occasion.) The teachers stated that the Wairau Valley community was a growing one, with a steadily increasing number of pre-school children. At the time of the fieldwork this was one of the largest groups visited by the mobile unit with 24 families officially enrolled. (A total of 22 children were present at the session held during the fieldwork period.)

Facilities Available to the Group

The Wairau Valley group met in the local sports pavilion used jointly by golf, cricket, and tennis groups. The building was wooden, modern, and considerably more compact than some of the big, old community halls the other mobile groups met in. (The Wairau group had also once met in an old hall but it was eventually decided that the lack of light and warmth inside and the lack of any grass to play on outside made it unsuitable and local parents took steps to find alternative accommodation.)

Inside the pavilion there was one large room, a well-equipped kitchen with a serving slide into the main room and toilet facilities. The large room, used for meetings and social functions contained several (adult-sized) tables and chairs and a community notice board. The floor down one side of the room was covered in linoleum while the other half was carpeted. A generous number of windows, together with gaily papered walls and curtains, gave an effect which was both cheerful and comfortable.



Interior view of Wairau Valley sports pavilion

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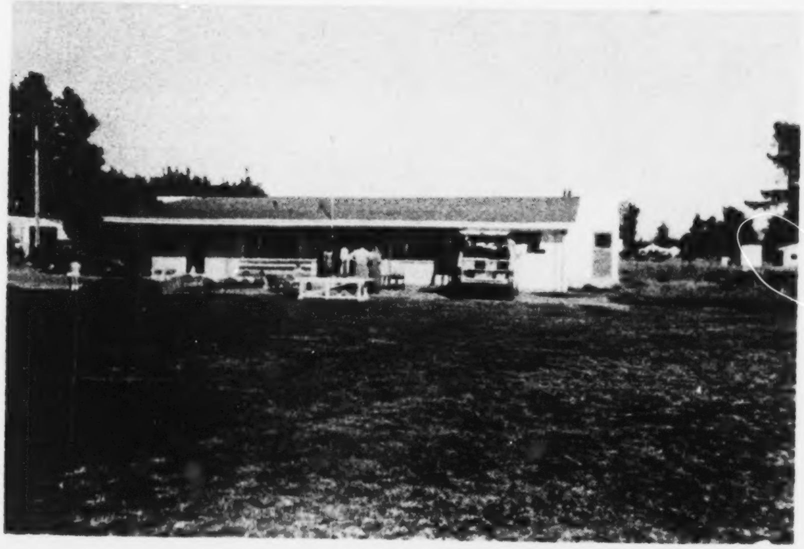

The sports pavilion, Wairau Valley

Marlborough Mobile Pre-School Unit

The outdoor area available to the children was not enclosed in any way and although the sports pavilion was situated down a quiet road, the children were still able to run about near to where people drew up in their cars.

Local parents had raised money to purchase a small aluminium shed in which to store the group's belongings; this had been placed alongside the sandpit (also the result of parent efforts) which in turn backed onto tennis courts enclosed by a tall wire fence.

Besides the sandpit, other permanent outdoor play provisions were a metal slide, see-saw, and swings. A few cable reels of various sizes were also stacked near the storage shed for use during sessions.

There was a very attractive view of trees and a range of mountains on one side of the playing area and tussock-covered hills on another.

The Session

When the teachers arrived, several parents, using the group's own supplies, had the setting-up process well under way. As the morning was calm and sunny following a heavy frost and it was warmer outside than in, parents had decided to set the session up outside. Accordingly, they had put five child-sized tables with chairs out on the gravelled area, uncovered the sandpit and brought out from the storage shed telephones, a rocking horse, trolley, large wooden trucks and other vehicles, painting easels, a piece of equipment for younger children which was a combination of a swing and a rocker, and a gymnastics mat.

The teachers supplemented what the parents had done by putting dough, collage materials (today, this was mainly magazines for children to cut out from), and crayons and paper on three of the tables; another table was set aside for the finger painting activity. On mats on the ground they put out books, puzzles, Duplo, a container of wooden blocks, and another of dressing up clothes (together with a selection of handbags and other accessories). The crawl tunnel was placed near the gymnasium mat, and the house containing the mobile unit's two mice was put on a table inside.

Outside at the Wairau Valley venue

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Marlborough Mobile Pre-School Unit

Once the setting up process was complete and they had greeted all the children, both teachers spent 25 minutes or so talking almost exclusively to parents. During this time, other than a baby and one or two of the five under-three-year-olds present who stayed near their mothers, children (16 of enrolled age and three or four of those who were younger) played together in the sandpit and crawl tunnel and on the swings and see-saw. They seemed to enjoy the opportunity simply to be together and to take part in activities not possible at home; most sought little or no interaction with any of the adults who merely supervised from a distance.

After the time spent with parents, one of the teachers got the finger painting activity underway while the other worked with children who were cutting out pictures from magazines and sticking them onto pieces of paper.

As at the Linkwater session the previous day, the teachers again decided to try the finger painting exercise with instant pudding mix. This time, the atypical mixture met with more success with most children prepared to 'paint' with it (although they were tentative to begin with). Some of the mixture was kept aside so that the children had a little bit each to eat after they had finished the activity *per se*.

After being asked to wash their hands first, successive small groups of children finger painted over a 40 minute period, each group first being instructed how to measure the milk and whisk the ingredients until it reached the desired thickness. Individual children were also encouraged to talk about the texture of the instant pudding.

The parent on duty, with the help of one or two other parents, prepared Vegemite sandwiches, pieces of apple, and fruit juice for the children's morning tea. These were made available from 10.20am on a table outside in the sun; the children then helped themselves over the next 15 minutes. The teachers and parents had a cup of tea or coffee and kept an eye on the children. (Shortly before morning tea, several women arrived to play golf; they spent some time in the clubrooms chatting and having a cup of tea before going out onto the course.)

The children at this session were very physically active, and although all 16 of the older children and one or two of the younger ones finger painted, and some of the group also completed collage work, worked with puzzles and with the dough, the majority spent the greater part of their time in the sandpit (building castles, roads and tunnels), on the swings, playing chase and 'play-fighting', jumping up and down on the gymnastics mat, crawling through the tunnel, taking turns on the see-saw and slide, and giving each other rides in the trolley. Only two children completed a painting; no one dressed up or asked to look at the mice. The teachers moved about amongst groups of children supervising, and facilitating play by making suggestions and drawing different children into conversation. The teachers often carried one or other of the smaller children around with them as they worked.

Prior to mat-time, the head teacher worked one-to-one with two four-year-olds on their homework books (about five minutes in each case), talking about what they had done and what they could do in the following week. Two parents and one or two of the younger children observed while this was taking place. The head teacher also spent time at the end of the session looking at scrapbooks belonging to two other children.

Everybody - adults and children alike - helped tidy up (from approximately 11.10am) until the children were called together for mat-time (held outside) at 11.20am. The group performed several action songs (eg "My Hands are Clapping") and then listened to the story of "Corduroy the Bear". Mat-time ended at 11.38am with a song about teddy bears, a follow-up to the story they had just been read.

Listening to a story during mat-time, Wairau Valley

The session was characterised by a great deal of physical activity on the part of the children (with plenty of cooperative play evident amongst the older children) and an equally large amount of social interaction amongst the adults.

Parents

A large group of parents (10) remained throughout the morning and another parent for part of the time. All helped with 'housekeeping' duties to at least some extent but the parent on duty was responsible for the bulk of these tasks. As well as preparing the morning tea for both children and adults and cleaning up again afterwards, the 'duty parent' - at the teachers' request - also spent time counting returned library books and repairing a few which needed attention.

Although the parents spent much of the morning enjoying the opportunity to meet and talk with other adults (one parent made a point of saying to the researcher that the mobile unit visits were "so important" socially for the parents and that she would hate to be without them) they were kept busy at intervals pushing different children on the swings, the rocking horse, and another piece of equipment with a wooden seat which rocked from side to side. One parent was also observed to spend several minutes assisting children working with puzzles.

Other Comments

One of the parents who lived only a short distance from the sports pavilion invited the teachers (and the researcher) for lunch. While the food was being prepared, the head teacher and the four-year-old whose home it was went through the child's homework book together. After a very enjoyable meal (including delicious home-baked bread) and a discussion of mobile unit affairs and other topics, the teachers left to drive to the Waihopai Valley venue.

Comments from the Teacher Diaries

Main activities involved in:

> ***"This session I was busy with children not wanting to participate in activities."***
>
> ***"Lots of small group work. Inside/outside duties shared with other teacher. Working and talking with parents."***

Best/worst aspects of session:

> ***"One child's temper tantrums were the worst [aspect of the session]. The best thing was when the child was cooperative and busy."***
>
> ***"The best [aspect of the session] was time spent with parents on parent education."***

Other comments:

> ***"This group has lots of under-threes and this does influence the types of play activities we provide there. A pleasant venue with lots of fun things going on."***

WAIHOPAI VALLEY: TUESDAY AFTERNOON, 3 MAY 1988

The Waihopai Valley is a farming community 34 kilometres west of Blenheim. It was an approximately 30 minutes drive from the morning's venue at Wairau Valley.

Facilities Available to the Group

The Waihopai Valley group met in a former shearers' cottage on a local sheep station owner's property.

The cottage, an old, wooden low-ceilinged building consisted of one reasonably large room (the overall dimensions of the cottage were, however, small) and a second, more compact room where parents usually congregated (when the weather did not enable them to go outside) while sessions were in progress. There was also a kitchen (with cold water only - but an electric jug was available for tea-making purposes), bathroom, and separate toilet. The interior walls of the cottage, painted white, were very thick, an indication of the age of the building. (The teachers commented that the cottage did not get really cold in winter, probably due to the thickness of the walls.) An enclosed verandah extended along the front of the cottage. As well as the rooms mentioned above, another room had been added to the original cottage at a much later date. This room, reached from the verandah, had windows on three sides, making it a very sunny and pleasant spot. Bare except for mats on the floor, the teachers made this the reading and puzzles room during the winter months and also used it for mat-times; it was just the right size for the small group which customarily attended sessions in the Waihopai Valley. (There were 10 families enrolled at the time of the fieldwork period.)

The shearers' cottage, Waihopai Valley

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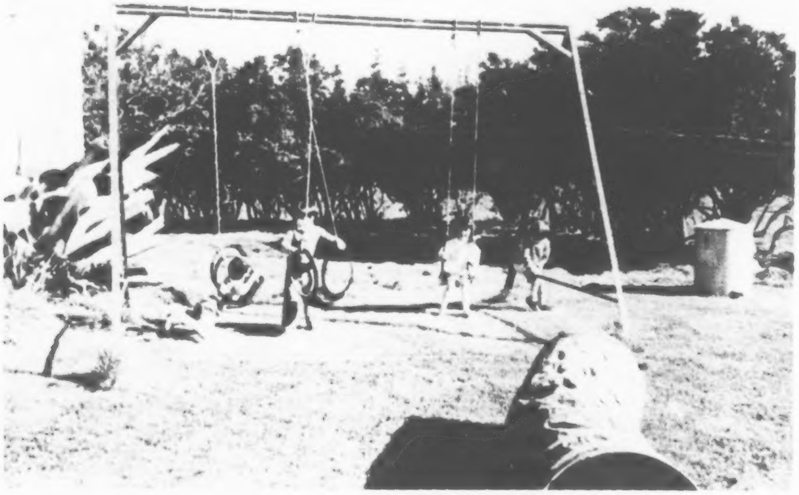
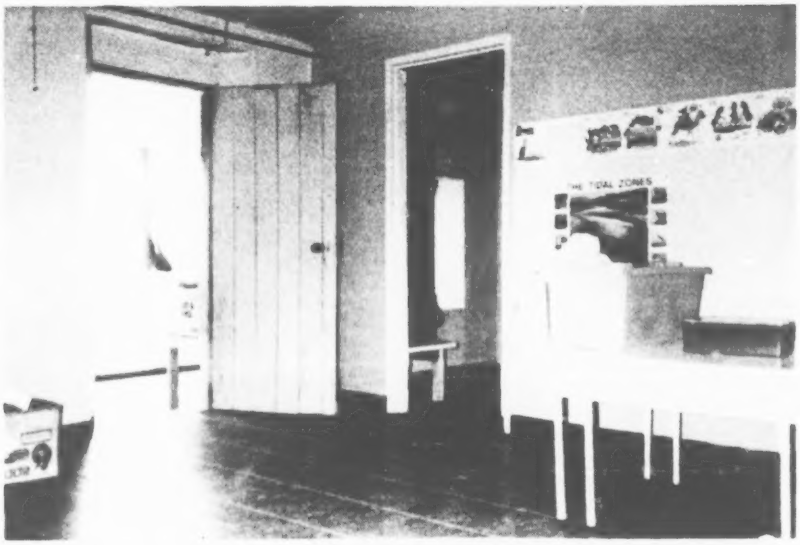
Apart from some old armchairs, a few wooden tables of different sizes and heights, and some mats on the wooden floors, the cottage contained very little. There were no curtains and no current art work by the children on the walls - the only decorations were a selection of fairly old posters and coloured pictures which had been cut out of magazines. (A new community hall was under construction further down the valley and the group were expecting to move there later in the year.) With the exception of the newest room, the cottage was dark and rather gloomy inside - a major reason for the parents and teachers looking forward to the proposed change of venue.

Outdoor play facilities consisted of a generous 'garden' - the play area, all grass, extended right around the cottage. There were trees, three swings (with seats made from old tyres), a sandpit, a 'geodesic' climbing dome, and a variety of wooden cable reels. The outlook from the cottage was of paddocks and a very pretty view of bush-clad hills.



Part of outdoor area, Waihopai Valley



Interior views of the Waihopai Valley venue

The Session

The teachers were the first to arrive at the cottage and were able to unpack and set up most equipment before any parents and children arrived. The painting easel and a rack on which to hang paintings to dry were put on the verandah, and the mice in their cage placed on a wooden bench seat nearby. Apart from books, puzzles, and Duplo which were set out in the sunny room used for mat-times, all other activities were kept outside on this occasion to take advantage of the lovely sunny and calm afternoon. Activities included finger painting (with instant pudding mix), the collage table (the selection of materials available included wood shavings, straws, coloured paper, and glue, as well as the usual selection of cardboard boxes and containers), equipment for use in the sandpit, dough play, and a selection of balls. The crawl tunnel and a mattress (stored at the cottage) to serve as a landing mat were also put out on the grass. Wooden planks placed between two of the cable reels provided a place for children to practise their climbing and balancing skills. Finally, the wall hanging consisting of a compartment for each child's belongings was hung up inside and the group's supply of aprons brought out for the children to put on before embarking on any 'messy play'.

After greeting each child as he or she arrived, the teachers spent the next 15 minutes or so talking with parents; the children spent this time 'exploring', seeing what activities were available and which of their peers had come to the session.

While one teacher was getting children involved in the finger-painting-with-instant-pudding activity, the other teacher, and three children, wandered around the garden to see what they could find. They 'found' the two goats which were tethered behind the cottage and spent several minutes looking at the goats and discussing their behaviour and characteristics. They were able to pat one goat but had been warned to avoid the other because it was inclined to butt. The little group - now increased to four children plus the teacher - carried on, discussing, in turn, a fantail, two paradise ducks, and a variety of autumn leaves. Later in the session, these same children plus two or three others spent time handling and discussing the mice. The teacher encouraged the children to examine the mice's feet and to try and describe how they were different from the sort of feet that the goats had. Two parents also joined in the discussion about the mice but declined to handle them themselves.

Discussing the mice, Waihopai Valley

All but one child had a turn at finger painting with the instant pudding mix. The exception was a boy who could not be persuaded to put his hands into the pudding. Eventually, the teachers just gave him a bowl and spoon and he happily ate his portion of the 'finger painting mix'. Some of the other children also demonstrated some initial reluctance but were able to overcome their inhibitions. The teachers talked with the children about the texture and taste of the mix.

As is usually the case amongst groups of pre-schoolers, the sandpit was a popular place to work and play. The children, on this occasion, were able to fill their buckets with water from an outside tap and make a satisfyingly wet, squishy mix to play in. (Each child was, however, restricted to using one bucket of water to avoid making everything awash for those who preferred to work with drier sand.) Both teachers spent time separately and together with children in the sandpit, observing, chatting, supervising, and sometimes giving practical assistance.

Four or five children completed paintings (both parents and teachers helped by putting on and taking off aprons, clipping paper to the easel, writing the child's name on his or her painting, and hanging the completed painting to dry afterwards) while others completed collage work. (One boy made a 'train' out of cardboard boxes which he then painted. He proudly showed what he had made to each of the teachers, as well as to his mother and one or two of his peers.)

Painting in the covered verandah area, Waihopai Valley

While the parent on duty was preparing afternoon tea for the children, one of the teachers played 'rough-and-tumble' with four children - this included tickling them, holding them upside down, and twirling them around. She was kept very busy by the four children; they seemed to greatly appreciate such 'rough' treatment.

Other activities children were observed to undertake throughout the session included climbing a tree (a boy and a girl), playing chase (two boys), playing in the crawl tunnel (and being rolled from side to side by a teacher while inside it), using the swings (several children required teacher and parental assistance), climbing on the geodesic dome, jumping from and walking between the cable reels, and playing ball games with a teacher and, later, with one of the parents.

All children were instructed to wash their hands for afternoon tea at about 2.15pm. They were then able to help themselves to the pieces of apple and glasses of fruit juice which the parent on duty had set out for them on a table outside. Teachers and parents supervised while having a cup of tea.

In the latter half of the session two boys (individually) went through work they had completed in their homework books with the head teacher; the head teacher also handed out new scrapbooks to three other children who were going to start doing 'homework' for the first time. She explained to each child in turn what they were to do.

In the mat-time area, Waihopai Valley

Mat-time was held inside for all eight children, including the two toddlers (although one toddler left almost immediately and the other some time later). Mat-time began with the group being Jack-in-the-Boxes: there was very loud jumping and laughing. The group then sang several songs and did finger plays. Before listening to a story of 'Hairy Maclary's Dairy' the children discussed what it had been like for them doing finger painting with instant pudding. Part way through the story one child, who was responding very enthusiastically to the teacher's questions about Hairy Maclary (a dog) and his doings, had to be asked not to yell so loudly (because it hurt the teacher's ears - not to mention the researcher's!) while a toddler, when asked not to hit one of the other children, objected strongly and began to 'fight' the teacher. The story was interrupted while the teacher spoke to the child and persuaded her to sit quietly on the mat once more. Following the story, each child - with the exception of the second toddler who had now gone to find her mother - took turns to pretend to be 'Scarface Claw' (a fierce cat from the story who attacks dogs) while the rest pretended to be dogs.

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The cat hid behind the portable book-stand and jumped out at the dogs; there was much laughing and screaming. Mat-time drew to a close with the teacher explaining that the next two weeks were the May holidays. Much to one boy's disappointment, she also explained that no library books were available until the next term. Finally, the group did some quiet exercises such as putting their hands on heads, shoulders, knees etc.

Parents

Four parents remained throughout the session. (Some families operated a car-pool system so it was not essential for all parents to attend every week.) All four parents were involved to a considerable extent with the children throughout the afternoon. For example, as mentioned earlier, they pushed children on the swings, played ball games and joined in a discussion about the mice. They also supervised and tended to the two toddlers as required. As well as interacting with the children there was still ample opportunity for them to chat together (one parent also taking the opportunity to do some knitting) and to the teachers. One parent discussed committee business with the head teacher; at another point all six adults discussed a number of families in the general area who had pre-schoolers but did not bring them to sessions. (One parent was heard to say that apart from their present venue the "only thing wrong" with the mobile unit was that there were "families in the valley who don't bother to support it".) The group discussed ways of encouraging non-participating families to come along. There was also concern expressed about another mother and child who used to attend regularly but had not done so for some weeks due to family problems. One of the women volunteered to call and offer to bring the child to sessions if the mother could not attend herself.

Comments from the Teacher Diaries

Main activities involved in:

> *"Mat-time was my main responsibility. Needed to talk to one child who tends to perform at times. Worked with small groups and one-to-one with some children. Talked to parents."*
>
> *"Worked with small groups and parents. Mainly worked outdoors today."*

Best/worst aspects of session:

"The worst aspect of the session was one boy's temper tantrums. The best was getting a quiet child to react and communicate."

"Good use of outside equipment by children was the best thing. The worst was tantrum children."

THE WAIMATE MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT, WAIMATE

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THE WAIMATE MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT, WAIMATE

Introduction

The Waimate mobile pre-school unit, one of five proposed new mobile units to be approved in the 1978 Budget, opened for children on 1 April 1979.

As part of a (1978) submission[1] made in support of establishing a mobile pre-school unit in the South Canterbury area, it was stated that:

> **'In the surrounding districts from Waimate there are a number of small townships which have sufficient pre-school children for the parents to form a playgroup [which could then be visited by the proposed mobile unit]. They [the parents] prefer this type of pre-school education where the parents are all involved. The distance is too great for these parents to bring their children to the recognised groups [ie a kindergarten and a playcentre] at Waimate.'**

In the planning stages for a Waimate-based mobile pre-school unit, Department of Education staff had enlisted the local kindergarten association to help collect data on the need for such a service in the communities surrounding Waimate. When approval to establish the mobile unit was eventually received, therefore, the Department of Education wrote to the secretary of the Waimate Kindergarten Association informing her of this. The letter (October 1978) included the following statements:

> **'The unit will be recognised as a free kindergarten. The Government will provide a Ford Transit van, funds for converting, equipping, maintaining and running the vehicle, the eventual replacement of the van, the salaries of a kindergarten head teacher and teacher to operate the service and the customary sessional and administration grants for which a free kindergarten is eligible.**
>
> **The cooperation of your association in the initial feasibility study and in enabling the advertisement for staff to be published is appreciated. The successful carrying out of the Government's intention to provide for families unable, through isolation, to enrol their children in a recognised pre-school centre will depend in large measure on the continued willingness of your association to pioneer a service unique to the needs of your particular locality.'**

---

[1] From Department of Education files.

The Itinerary of the Waimate Mobile Pre-School Unit

Initially, the Waimate mobile pre-school unit visited four centres - Makikihi, Morven, Glenavy, and Waihaorunga - with the different centres each receiving between one and three visits per week. Although the mobile unit no longer served the Makikihi community at the time the fieldwork was carried out (March 1988), it continued to visit groups at Morven, Glenavy, and Waihaorunga. In addition, it also attended groups in the Hakataramea Valley and at Ikiwai, Otaio, Southburn, and Hunter. The map opposite shows the location of the groups visited. Each of the eight groups on the mobile unit's itinerary received one session per week. As shown in Table 8.1, the mobile unit teachers travelled approximately 389 kilometres per week, with a total travel time of six-and-a-half hours.

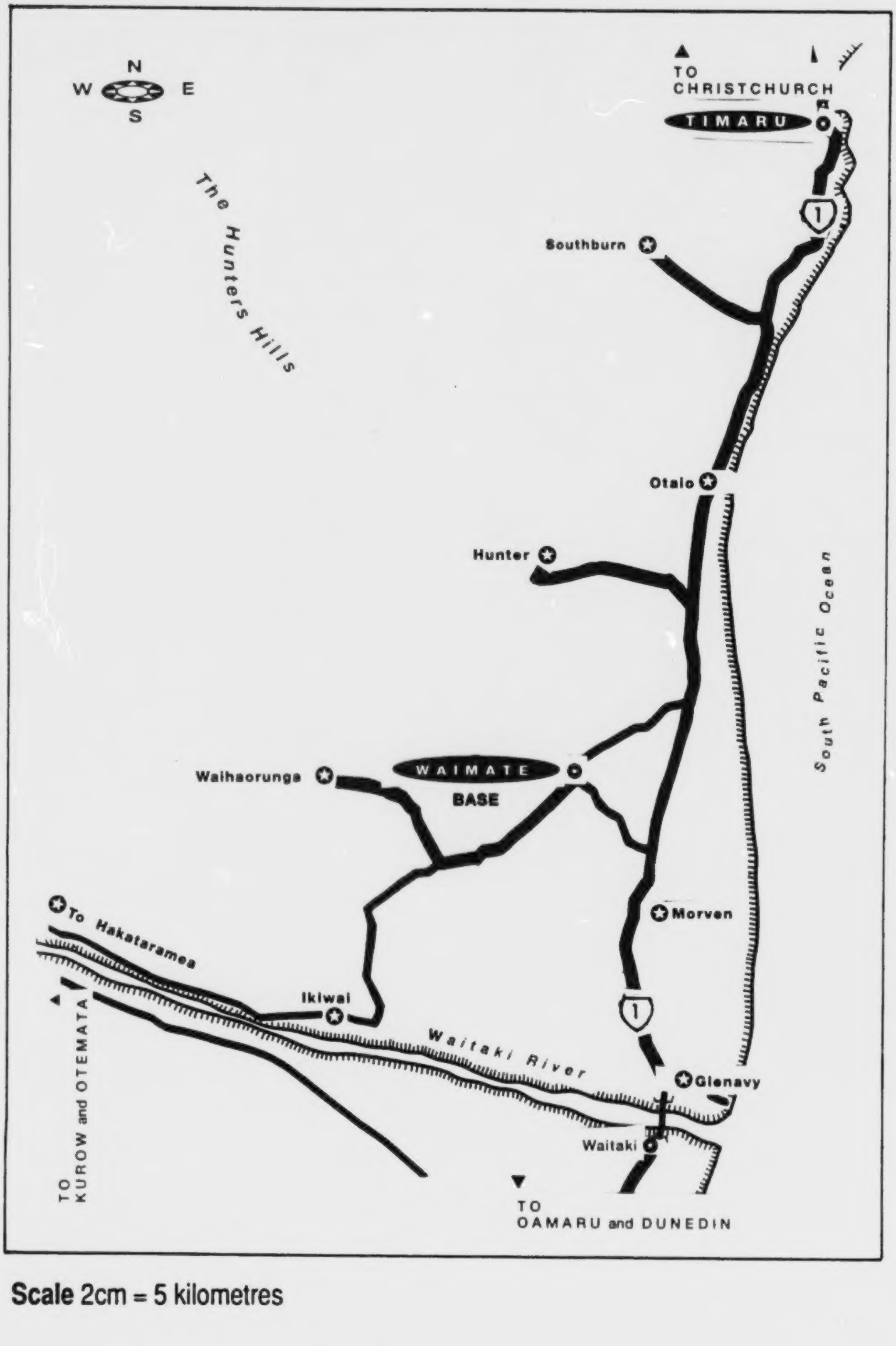
Information on Department of Education files reveals that there have been a number of changes in itinerary throughout the mobile unit's history, according to fluctuations in the size of the population in various districts and the numbers of children requiring pre-school education.

At the time the fieldwork was carried out, a further change in itinerary was about to take place: the teachers explained that their smallest group (Glenavy), which had around five children over the age of $2^1/_2$ years attending on a regular basis, was to go into recess. This was to enable them (the teachers) to begin a new group at Waituna, not far from Hunter, where another of their groups was based. The teachers hoped and believed that the proposed new group would attract some children and parents who normally attended the very large Hunter group (and so relieve the feeling of never having enough time to spend with children there), as well as serving other children in the area not receiving any form of pre-school education. (The teachers commented that although they would be very sorry to close the Glenavy group, where they very much enjoyed working with both parents and children, they felt that most, if not all, of these families would be able to attend one of their other groups without too much added inconvenience.)

The Communities Served by the Waimate Mobile Pre-School Unit

While the teachers did not have specific details (as they pointed out, such details are no longer requested when parents enrol their children at kindergarten) about the sorts of employment that all families associated with the mobile unit were involved in, they stated that the large majority were in farming or farming-related pursuits.

Waimate Mobile Pre-School Unit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W
E
S
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TO CHRISTCHURCH
TIMARU
1
Southburn
Otaio
Hunter
South Pacific Ocean
Waihaorunga
WAIMATE
BASE
Morven
To Hakataramea
Ikiwai
1
Waitaki River
Glenavy
Waitaki
TO KUROW and OTEMATA
TO OAMARU and DUNEDIN

Scale 2cm = 5 kilometres

Table 8.1: Approximate distances travelled per week and the time spent travelling by the Waimate mobile pre-school unit teachers

	Base to morning destination			Morning destination to afternoon destination			Afternoon destination to base		Total kilometres per day	Total travelling time per day (mins)
	Morning destination	Distance travelled (kilometres)	Travelling time (mins)	Afternoon destination	Distance travelled (kilometres)	Travelling time (mins)	Distance travelled (kilometres)	Travelling time (mins)		
Monday	Base (Admin and planning)	-	-	Glenavy	24	30	24	30	48	60
Tuesday	Hakataramea Valley	75	65	Ikiwai	46	35	28	30	149	130
Wednesday	Otaio	21	20	Southburn	21	20	42	40	84	80
Thursday	Morven	13	15	Waihaorunga (via Waimate)	38	40	25	25	76	80
Friday	Hunter	16	20	Base (Admin and planning)	16	20	-	-	32	40
								Weekly totals	389 kilometres	390 minutes (6 hrs 30 mins)

When asked in the interview to describe the communities that they served, one of the teachers stated:

> ***"I don't think any of them are terribly well off just now. It's not a really poor area but it's not wealthy either, not at this time with the downturn in the farming economy. Some mothers, especially those who are nurses, are doing night-time nursing or other jobs to help supplement the husband's income. Most groups have a mixture of families who either own their own farms - there are one or two very big properties - while others work on stations or farms as married couples. There are a few families where the husbands work as freezing workers or shearers and some who work in shops. And there are perhaps a few who are unemployed just now."***

The other teacher's perceptions of the communities served by the mobile unit were similar.

Neither teacher felt that any of the various communities had any particular special needs which affected the way they worked with the children and parents. Nor did the teachers feel that seasonal farming commitments had any marked effect - for example, lower attendance levels - on the programme that they ran. In most cases, they had found that parents, if they could not attend a session themselves, usually managed to arrange for their child to be brought along by someone else. The only possible disruption to sessions occurred when events at local primary schools clashed with a visit scheduled by the mobile unit. (The teachers tried to liaise with schools to ensure that this did not happen.) If, however, attendance at a particular group was markedly affected for this reason, the teachers generally elected to go along to the school as well and see the children there.

Parents Associated with the Waimate Mobile Pre-School Unit

As shown in Table 8.2, large numbers of parents usually remained throughout sessions held by the Waimate mobile pre-school unit. Although sessions were frequently regarded by parents as an important social occasion, the numbers of parents who remained was also a measure of the interest that many parents in the communities served by the unit maintained in the mobile pre-school unit and the education of their children. As well, it reflected the particular philosophy of this unit that, although trained kindergarten teachers visited each group on a weekly basis and implemented a programme that they had devised, the groups nevertheless belonged to the parents. The head teacher stated that, from the outset (she had been associated with the mobile unit in the first year of its operation and, since then, had worked in her full-time, permanent capacity for a number of years), it had been impressed upon her by successive district officers - early childhood education, and others, that parents had ultimate responsibility for their own groups and for the children who attended them. The teacher explained this as follows:

> ***"The thing about our mobile unit is that we were always told never to forget that they are the parents' groups. As teachers, we are the visitors, we are not 'responsible' for the children. We try not to take the feeling of the group belonging to the people away from them. We come in with our equipment and take it away again and they [the parents] are supposed to be there with everything ready for you to start. They are also supposed to carry on for an extra half hour - which doesn't happen - but I don't like to make many rules for them. I feel I can't go in and say 'now you do this and you do that'. But I do try and encourage them [eg] to work with the children as well as supervising the children. Some parents are really good and look after their children automatically but other parents never seem to think. Theoretically, it isn't our job to supervise the children but sometimes the parents don't notice the little ones getting into the paints and things, and sometimes we have got to step in. Sometimes you also have to remind the parents to supervise children outside as well as inside and to not be too noisy because this disrupts the session, especially when you are trying to read to the children or do something with the whole group."***

Although she recognised and agreed with the concept of the groups belonging to the parents, the head teacher also went on to say that this was not always entirely workable in practice. For instance, she further stated:

> ***"Although we are not responsible, as I said, for the children, I do think that we are responsible to see that everything goes smoothly [at sessions]. Actually, when I think of it, a lot of responsibility does fall on our shoulders because the whole running of the mobile unit ultimately falls back on the teachers... We are responsible for bringing those parents together. It [the mobile unit] would fall apart if we didn't do a good job, I am sure of that. If we didn't take an interest, a big interest, it would fall apart quickly."***[2]

Despite the teachers finding, at times, that large numbers of adults remaining throughout sessions made their work more difficult (mainly because of the noise level when everyone had to be inside due to adverse weather or when space at certain venues was at a premium), they also enjoyed the presence of parents, describing a typical session as "a friendly, happy family group". They believed that sessions were an important social occasion for many otherwise isolated parents; they themselves also liked the opportunity to talk with parents about any child-related (or other) problems or concerns that the parents might have. As stated on pages 71-72 of Volume I of this report, the teachers felt that one of their major roles with parents was simply to reassure parents that their children were progressing 'normally'.

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[2] Evidence to support this claim comes, perhaps, from the finding that at the time the fieldwork was carried out, no groups ran additional sessions on the days that the mobile unit did not visit. Although parents from one or two groups had tried to do so in the past, their attempts had not lasted.

Table 8.2: Number of parents present at sessions held by the Waimate mobile pre-school unit during the fieldwork period and in the following week

Name of group	Number of parents present at sessions held during the fieldwork period	Number of parents present (as reported by the teachers) in the week following the fieldwork period
Glenavy[a]	-	5
Hakataramea Valley	13	11
Ikiwai	11	9
Otaio	10	7
Southburn	12	8
Morven	15	13
Waihaorunga	9	5[b]
Hunter	18	13[b]

a Due to strike action by kindergarten and primary school teachers nationwide this group could not be visited during the observation week.

b As their children were scheduled to receive hepatitis B vaccinations during session times fewer parents than usual were present at these groups in the week following the fieldwork period.

As evidenced by comments made in the Parent Questionnaire used for the study, parents overall (despite the groups with which they were associated often being very individual in nature in terms of outlook and extent of parental involvement during sessions) felt very favourably about the service provided by the Waimate mobile pre-school unit. A sample of 'typical' comments follows:

> ***"The unit is a great asset to any rural community and it is a pity there cannot be more of them as I have got as much out of it as my children in the area of meeting people around you - people that you wouldn't otherwise see on a weekly basis. Because you have got to stay for the length of kindy, your younger children not yet kindy age also get a great deal of benefit from it. As this is sometimes the only***

chance for a mother at home to see anyone other than her own children in a lengthy period it makes for saner mothers and therefore happy children."

"I think it is an excellent service for rural communities, especially for areas where distance would stop anyone going to an ordinary town kindergarten. The service provides everything a child would get in a kindergarten only it is closer to home and it also provides an opportunity for the parents to get together as well. (At the town kindy, the children are dropped off and left and then picked up again at the end and there might only be the teachers and perhaps a mother-help there to talk to, compared with all the mothers to talk to at the mobile unit, as they stay with the children.) And with the full age range from birth up to five, the older children learn to play with the younger children and vice versa. I think the theme which is provided each week, even though it might be hard for the teachers to think of something different each week, is excellent because it gives the children something to work to."

"We are very fortunate to have two very dedicated teachers, and they do their best to provide a wide range of pre-school learning and social experiences for children. This helps prepare country children to go to school without the trauma they would experience without this facility. Also, because of the nature of the mobile unit coming to the district, children attend from babyhood and never experience the shyness that they seem to when they don't go until they are much older."

"I like the friendliness of the mobile unit - no pressures. Also the chance to work alongside the children and be involved with their education."

"One of the best aspects of the mobile unit is the way the teachers communicate with the children and parents. Another is the equipment, books, puzzles, toys, and games that are available to our children. It also gets children and parents out to meet with others."

"What I like best about our mobile unit is its versatility, the educational gap it bridges for the children, our very kind, patient, concerned teachers. For us as parents there is also the company of other mums for social and educational communication. There is also the enjoyment that my children get from sessions and the subsequent feedback to father when we get home."

The Children

The teachers reported that, at the time the fieldwork was carried out, there were a total of 123 families, spread across the eight different groups visited, enrolled at the Waimate mobile pre-school unit. These families included 116 children aged between $2^1/_2$ and five years (ie those old enough to be 'officially' enrolled) and 64 younger children who were likely to attend sessions on a regular basis. Babies and any other children under $2^1/_2$ years were welcome to attend sessions as long as they were accompanied by an adult. For this reason, the concept of a waiting list was not relevant at this mobile unit.

Table 8.3 shows how many children attended sessions during the observation period (15 to 18 March, 1988) while Table 8.4 records the number present at sessions in the following week (as recorded in the Teacher Diaries).

Table 8.3: Number of children present at each session held by the Waimate mobile pre-school unit during the fieldwork period

Name of group/time	Number of enrolled children[a] present	Number of non-enrolled children present	Total number present
Glenavy (Monday pm)[b]	-	-	-
Hakataramea Valley (Tuesday am)	16	6	22
Ikiwai (Tuesday pm)	9	3	12
Otaio (Wednesday am)	14	5	19
Southburn (Wednesday pm)	13	7	20
Morven (Thursday am)	14	2	16
Waihaorunga (Thursday pm)	8	5	13
Hunter (Friday am)	18	8	26

[a] Children aged $2^1/_2$ years up to 5 years.

[b] Refer to footnote b in Table 8.2.

Table 8.4: Number of children present (as reported by teachers) at sessions held in the week following the fieldwork period

Name of group/time	Number of enrolled children present	Number of non-enrolled children present	Total number present
Glenavy	5	3	8
Hakataramea Valley	13	6	19
Ikiwai	10	3	13
Otaio	14	5	19
Southburn	9	7	16
Morven	15	4	19
Waihaorunga	6	4	10[a]
Hunter	11	9	20[a]

[a] The teachers noted in their 'Teacher Diaries' that at each of these groups: "A number of children were absent because of it being hepatitis B injection day in the area".

Facilities Available to the Waimate Mobile Pre-School Unit

When asked in the interview whether there were 'any particular problems with the facilities (accommodation) available at the different locations or groups that you visit which affect your work with the children and parents' one teacher, summing up the views expressed by both teachers, commented:

> ***"All venues are different but we just have to take what is available. Some can be cold in the winter and sometimes the rooms are too small but we can't be too worried about it. You make the most of what you have got and just change things around to suit you as much as possible."***

Descriptions of the facilities available at each group begin on page 461 following.

Administration

The Waimate mobile pre-school unit teachers devoted Monday mornings and Friday afternoons to administration and planning work. In the Teacher Diaries completed for the study in the week following the fieldwork period, the head teacher stated that during the Monday administration session she had (for example) contacted the secretary of the mobile unit's management committee, prepared "material for the week's activities and [carried out] administrative work for the kindergarten association president". The other teacher had mixed fresh supplies of paint and also helped prepare all other activities planned for the week ahead.

Both teachers commented that Friday afternoons were especially busy for them. For instance, in their Diaries completed on 25 March 1988, one teacher wrote that she had changed the selection of puzzles and books carried in the van, found pictures suitable for the next week's theme and pinned them to the 'theme board', filled up pasting dishes, washed paint pots etc, completed the rolls, and drawn up an inventory of equipment. The second teacher had "emptied the van, washed all equipment and aprons, cleaned the inside of the van, prepared paper, and filled the van with petrol." (Not surprisingly, she also commented that there was "not enough time today".)

As part of their administrative duties it was necessary to liaise closely with the local kindergarten association, district officers - early childhood education, and the mobile unit's management committee. The teachers' experience had been very positive: they had found members of each of these groups to be consistently helpful and supportive of the mobile unit and its (and, therefore, the teachers') work. (The head teacher mentioned, for instance, that when she felt that there should be a change in itinerary she had never had to face undue opposition to her proposal: she simply put the suggestion to the kindergarten association and to the current district officer - early childhood education who then sought permission for any change from the Department of Education.)

The mobile pre-school unit teachers shared office accommodation with teachers at the Waimate Kindergarten, situated close to the town centre. The mobile unit had been allocated a small office, separate from that of the other teachers, in which to work and to store smaller equipment such as puzzles and books. Larger equipment was able to be kept in a small storage shed which they shared with the town kindergarten; items of equipment were also left in the van. Although they had to share the use of the telephone and facilities for washing equipment, the teachers were generally satisfied with the accommodation available to them and enjoyed the opportunity to meet and exchange ideas with other kindergarten teachers on a regular basis. (The opportunity to meet with early childhood workers would otherwise seldom have been possible.) One teacher did comment, however, that their work would be facilitated by the availability of some sort of carport or other shelter under which to work when cleaning out the van on Friday afternoons. She commented that, in winter, or when it was raining, it could be extremely cold and uncomfortable moving equipment in and out of the van without any shelter at all, especially as it was not possible to drive the van close to the storage shed at the back of the property, with the result that everything had to be carried quite some distance.

The Van

In common with all but the YWCA mobile unit, the Waimate mobile pre-school unit had a late model Ford Econovan at its disposal. A local person had been especially commissioned to fit the van with shelves and compartments. These greatly improved the van's capacity for storing, and safely transporting, equipment; as well, they facilitated the ease and speed with which the teachers were able to load and unload equipment into and out of the van. (The teachers had devised an efficient system whereby they knew exactly where different types of equipment were kept in the van; for this reason, they had requested parents not to attempt to pack the van themselves at the end of each session for fear that their system would be disrupted.)

The van was garaged overnight and at weekends at a service station only one to two minutes walk from the mobile unit's base at the Waimate Kindergarten. The garage mechanics, as well as storing the vehicle, also carried out regular checks and any repairs as required.

The Programme Run by the Waimate Mobile Pre-School Unit Teachers

The teachers' basic philosophy for working with the children who attended groups visited by the Waimate mobile pre-school unit was, first and foremost, to promote positive, social interactions amongst the children (many of whom had few other opportunities during the course of a normal week to meet with their peers). They also liked to encourage children, within a happy and safe environment, to develop new skills and to extend others by taking part in a variety of activities; as well, they devoted much of their time during sessions to simply talking to the children, especially ones whom they knew to be very shy. The teachers' views on working with children are referred to in more detail in Chapter 3 of Volume I of this report; however, one teacher summed up both her, and the other teacher's, feelings as follows:

> ***"What I like best about working on the mobile unit is that I know that the children like to come to sessions and I know that I am providing the opportunity for pre-school education to children who wouldn't otherwise have any. I know that the children talk about it [ie coming to the mobile unit session] all week at home and this is their day and I think that is the kick I get out of it, seeing their smiling little faces and***

> ***being able to help these children. It's lovely to see the children progress, becoming less shy and so on."***

In order to put their basic philosophy into practice as successfully as possible in the limited time available to spend with individual groups each week, the teachers had developed a format for sessions which they felt worked well. Their programme each week (which was repeated in all its essentials at each group visited) revolved around a theme (eg during the observation period this was on caterpillars and butterflies and similar creatures) which had been planned in advance. Although they always had a range of general activities (such as dough, puzzles, painting, carpentry, water play, and a variety of outdoor activities) available on a free-play basis, special activities (typically two) were designed to reflect the session theme. Usually, special activities involved the children in making something. (This also satisfied parents, many of whom liked their children to take home 'tangible evidence' of their time spent at sessions.) While participation in such activities was not mandatory, the teachers made a point of inviting all children old enough to be officially enrolled to at least attempt one of these activities. Often, the theme was carried further and was reflected in the books the teachers selected to read to the children and in the songs they chose for the group to sing. The teachers made a point, too, of drawing children's attention to pictures on the theme board (this board was carried in the van and displayed at each venue; each week it carried a different selection of illustrations according to what the theme dictated).

The teachers were constantly aware of the need to cater for a wide age range of children at each of their sessions. They met this challenge, in part, by providing scrapbooks for any of the older, enrolled children who wanted them. In these books, the children were assigned tasks to do at home with their parents. The teachers had found the theme concept to be a particularly useful one in this respect - ie they advised parents in advance what the theme was to be for the following week's sessions; this enabled any parents who wished to do so to talk with their child about the theme and to carry out, together, activities relating to the theme - eg writing a short story, cutting out pictures from magazines, or collecting items to bring along to show to the group. (At one of the sessions observed during the fieldwork period, for instance, two children who knew about the upcoming theme on 'bugs' brought along a snail and a praying mantis.)

In the latter part of each of their sessions, the teachers always organised activities on a large group basis. The activities, designed to encourage the children to work cooperatively together and to have fun as a group, included games, exercises, finger plays, and singing and performing (action) songs. The final part of the large group time was always devoted to children who had completed something in their 'homework' books - in front of the group, each such child was given the opportunity to display what she or he had done; in turn, each child received a teacher's undivided attention and plenty of other positive feedback. Although participation in the large group activity was again voluntary, the teachers actively encouraged all enrolled children to take part. Because they liked this period to be a time especially for the older children, the teachers preferred that very young children, likely to disrupt proceedings, stayed with their parents in another room.

Equipment Available to the Mobile Unit

The Waimate mobile pre-school unit had a full and varied supply of equipment and materials available for use with groups. The teachers liked to vary the range on offer at sessions as often as practicable; certain venues also dictated to some extent what equipment was made available, as did the weather, the chosen theme for the week, and the age range, interests, and needs of children at any given session.

The teachers preferred the system under which they operated, whereby the mobile unit itself was responsible for providing, from its central store, most of the equipment which was used at the sessions that they held, rather than relying on individual groups to provide it. (They often found, however, that some of the things gathered together by groups were useful adjuncts to their own supplies, especially furniture, which would have been impossible for them to carry in the van in any case.) The mobile unit also lent out certain pieces of equipment - for example, wooden steps and ladders for the children to climb on - to groups which did not have similar items of their own. Occasionally, too, it had been found that children at some groups favoured particular activities more than children at other groups - these activities were therefore lent to the group for a period rather than being kept in the van or stored back at the base kindergarten.

The teachers commented that although they were satisfied with their range of equipment and the opportunity to update and extend it, they were constantly on the look-out for items which could withstand the special requirements of a pre-school which was mobile in nature. One of the teachers described the problem:

> ***"I think we do pretty well as far as our range and amount of equipment, but our biggest problem is getting equipment designed to stand up to the use we need to make for it, getting it sturdy enough, and not too heavy to carry. (We had our portable tables repaired recently but they came back much heavier which makes them more difficult to manage.) We are looking at ways to make things more suitable all the time so it is a matter of being able to construct things or get things***

> ***made by people according to how we are going to have to use them. We have had very good support from [mobile unit parent] committee people getting their fathers and husbands and various people to make things for us (like those wooden rolling pins the children use for dough, which a local man has just finished for us). And, yes, we had our 'library' container redesigned and had wheels put on it because we got sick of carrying it. The wheels make it like a suitcase [on wheels], and you can trundle it along which is much better. It's a matter of finding someone who has got the know-how to design things for us because anything that you can buy, which although suitable for ordinary kindergarten use, is just not sturdy enough for the treatment that we are going to give it."***

Length of Sessions Held by the Waimate Mobile Pre-School Unit

As shown in Table 8.5, morning sessions held by the Waimate mobile pre-school unit were, on average, approximately two hours and 20 minutes in length (the mobile unit's itinerary allowed two-and-a-quarter hours for morning sessions, not counting time needed for unpacking and packing up), while afternoon sessions were two hours long.

Almost always, parents who had been rostered for duty were available to help the teachers unpack the van and set up the session; this was generally completed before the session was due to begin and seldom took longer than 10 minutes (Table 8.6). Although the parents did not pack the van itself (as stated earlier, the teachers preferred to do this), they prepared everything - while the large group activities were underway - ready for the teachers to load into the van at the end of the session. Mostly, this process took between five and 10 minutes.

Table 8.5: Length of sessions and times sessions began and ended during the fieldwork period at the Waimate mobile pre-school unit

Name of group/time	Time session began	Time session ended	Length of session[a]
Glenavy (Monday pm)[b]	-	-	-
Hakataramea Valley[c] (Tuesday am)	9.10am	11.30am	2hrs 20mins
Ikiwai (Tuesday pm	1.00pm	3.03pm	2hrs 3mins
Otaio (Wednesday am)	9.07am	11.30am	2hrs 23mins
Southburn (Wednesday pm)	1.03pm	3.06pm	2hrs 3mins
Morven (Thursday am)	9.08am	11.32am	2hrs 24mins
Waihaorunga (Thursday pm)	1.10pm	3.10pm	2hrs
Hunter (Friday am)	9.20am	11.46am	2hrs 26mins

a Not including time taken to unpack and repack equipment before and after sessions.

b Refer to footnote b, Table 8.2.

c In order to reach this venue in time, the teachers left their base at 7.50am.

Table 8.6: Time (in minutes) taken to unpack and pack up at each session

Name of group	Time taken to unpack and set up session[a]	Time taken to pack up etc[b]
Glenavy[c]	-	-
Hakataramea Valley	10	8
Ikiwai	5	5
Otaio	12	10
Southburn	8	9
Morven	5	5
Waihaorunga	10	10
Hunter	20	10

a Includes time spent by teachers before and shortly after sessions began. Unpacking completed after the beginning of a session did not interrupt the flow of activities.

b Does not include preliminary packing during session time; this was largely completed by parents while the teachers were leading large group activities near the end of the session.

c Refer to footnote b in Table 8.2.

Teachers' Comments on what a 'Typical' Day or Week was Like for Them on the Waimate Mobile Pre-School Unit

Teacher 1:

"On Monday mornings we go to the office and try and prepare everything we need for the week - mainly because it is too difficult to have to pull things out of the van at night and change things in the middle of the week. So we try to look ahead for the whole week and prepare everything accordingly otherwise you know you are going to be in trouble. It is a busy morning but it is also relaxing because there are only the two of us and we have time to discuss things that go on during the week. Our Monday afternoon session is very small at the present time. (As I've mentioned before we are going to change the venue.) We find that Monday afternoon can drag a little bit because of the small number of children, although the children still enjoy it. Tuesday morning starts very early for us [because of a long drive to the Hakataramea Valley group]: we collect the van about 7.45am, and from there the rest of the week goes very quickly. It is just go, go, go. A lot of travelling. We have lunch away from Waimate (we take a picnic) on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, lunch in Waimate on Thursdays, and Friday lunchtime brings us to the end of sessions with the children. On Friday afternoons we bring the van up the drive [of the Waimate Kindergarten], unpack it, and give it a thorough clean and tidy. Friday afternoon is a real clean-up time. We are really very busy all week."

Teacher 2:

"Basically, our week involves sharing the driving of the van, unloading it, setting equipment and activities up at each group, and perhaps changing things around occasionally at the different venues to make things a bit more exciting and make the session work better. We run the session and then it's packing-up time and moving on to the next venue. It's all go. It's also having to keep an eye on whether you are about to run out of anything and perhaps spending your lunch hour preparing some more stuff if you haven't made enough - it can sometimes be a bit hard to estimate what you need because you don't know whether you are going to have full attendance at each group or what activities are going to appeal most to the children on a particular day. For me, it's also being able to mix with country mums and country children - they are delightful - and going out into the country which I love."

A DESCRIPTION OF EACH VENUE VISITED AND SESSIONS HELD BY THE WAIMATE MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT DURING THE FIELDWORK PERIOD

The Waimate mobile pre-school unit teachers customarily carried out administration and planning work in their office on Monday mornings, then ran a session for the Glenavy group in the afternoons. However, at the time the fieldwork was carried out, it was not possible to observe at Glenavy: nationwide industrial action by kindergarten and primary school teachers on 14 March 1988 meant that the session was not able to be held. The first session to be observed, therefore, was the Tuesday morning one in the Hakataramea Valley, described below.

HAKATARAMEA VALLEY: TUESDAY MORNING, 15 MARCH 1988

The teachers - and the researcher - left the base kindergarten in Waimate at 7.50am, arriving at the venue in the Hakataramea Valley at 8.50am, a total travel time of one hour. The 75 kilometre journey was via the Waitaki Valley.

Facilities Available to the Group

The Hakataramea Valley group met in a cottage belonging to the Moneta Downs Station, a large farming property. The cottage was used almost exclusively by the mobile pre-school group. This meant that the group was able to leave equipment (most of which belonged to the group itself, although a few items of equipment were 'on loan' from the mobile unit's central supply of equipment) permanently set up between sessions and to decorate the walls as they pleased. The only other time the cottage was used was when local people met for bridge evenings. Although these were held on a regular basis, the bridge players always set up and dismantled the tables that they used themselves and made sure the cottage was left ready for the mobile group's use every Tuesday.

The cottage was old, with the musty smell characteristic of old buildings. Although its interior also seemed dark due to lack of natural light, the atmosphere of the cottage was cheerful once the session was underway.

The cottage consisted of a large kitchen, a bathroom, hall, and two other rooms, one approximately twice the size of the other.

The kitchen, as well as being used to prepare the morning tea, was also the place where parents gathered to chat during sessions when the weather did not allow people to go outside. In addition, activities such as dough play were usually set up in this area to improve available work space in the other rooms.

The bathroom, to the left of the kitchen via a small hallway, contained an old bath (not used!) and a basin where the children could wash their hands. (The three toilets available at this venue were in a separate building outside.)

Just beyond the kitchen was a 'middle' room where the painting easels were set up and the children customarily carried out activities such as cutting and pasting and collage work. Displayed on the walls of this room were a generous number of colourful posters and children's paintings and other art work.

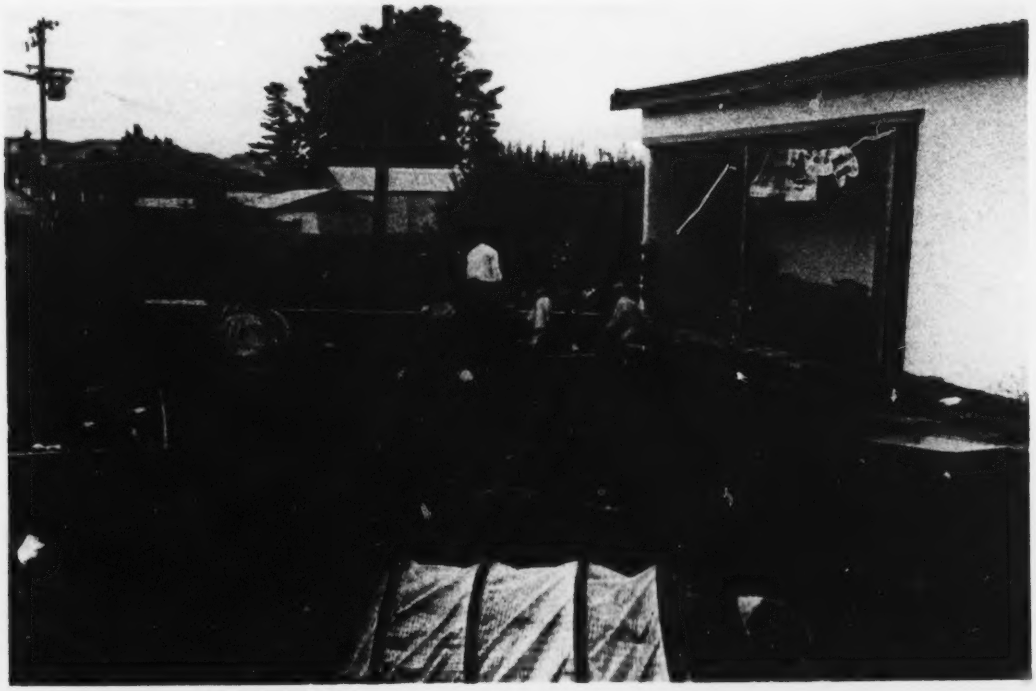
As well as the room just mentioned, there was another quite long, narrow room containing a piano. (The piano was a very recent acquisition: local parents had installed it in time for the session held the previous week. However, this was the first time the teachers had seen the piano as they had been unable to make it to the previous session due to mechanical problems with the van.) At the other end of the room, there was a 'family corner' containing a selection of dolls, dressing up clothes and play furniture. (No children played in the family corner at this session, presumably because it was such a pleasant morning and they preferred to spend as much of it as possible outside.)

Although it had mats on the floor and a few posters and examples of children's art work on the walls, the 'long' room was fairly bare. There was therefore plenty of space to set out on a low table the puzzles that the teachers had brought with them, and to put the containers of Lego and wooden equipment - which slotted together in much the same way as Lego - out on mats on the floor. (A selection of wooden trucks and other vehicles which belonged to the group was also available.) Later in the morning, when these activities had been cleared away, this room was used for large group activities.

The cottage was surrounded by a generous expanse of grass, securely fenced all the way around. Although the cottage was situated on private property - not far from the property owner's farmhouse - and well away from any traffic, the gate was kept firmly closed once everyone had arrived and the session was in progress. (A disadvantage of the fence, however, was that it was not possible to drive the van right up to door of the cottage in order to facilitate unloading of the van; this meant that the teachers had to carry everything they unpacked from the van right across the yard.) The outlook from the cottage, entirely rural in aspect, was a very pleasant one of paddocks and trees. One or two horses and some other stock were also visible.

The van parked outside the gate at the Hakataramea Valley venue

Permanent provisions for outdoor play at the Hakataramea venue included a sandpit (kept covered with black polythene between sessions to protect it from the weather and from animals), metal climbing frames, a climbing 'structure' made from old tractor tyres stacked on top of one another, and a steering column and wheel from an old car which had been concreted into the ground. These items of equipment were supplemented by wooden steps and ladders (on loan to the group from the mobile unit's central supply of equipment) and, at this particular session, a clear plastic, concertina crawl tunnel (the ends of which could be domed together for ease of storage once the tunnel had been 'collapsed'), a wagon, a carpentry table plus pieces of wood, nails, hammers, and vice, buckets of water and large paint brushes for 'decorating' the house, and a container of metal trucks and farm vehicles and buckets and spades, for using in the sandpit.



Outside at the Hakataramea Valley venue (farmhouse and farm buildings are in the background)

The Session

There were no parents present when the van arrived at 8.50am so the teachers quickly set about unpacking and setting up activities and equipment themselves. Although the teachers continued to set up some equipment until between five and ten minutes past nine, the children began playing together and using available equipment the moment they arrived. (The first parent and child arrived at 9.05am; everyone else who attended was present by 9.30am. The session was mainly a combination of free play and small group work. There was also a large group session at around 11am when the teachers led the children for music and games.

While the teachers organised activities inside at the beginning of the session, the parents (no fathers were present) were responsible for making ready the outdoor equipment - ie they uncovered the sandpit, balanced a board between the two ends of the metal climbing frames so that the children could walk between them, and placed mattresses beneath all pieces of climbing apparatus in order to protect the children should they fall. (The children also enjoyed jumping onto the mattresses as part of their play.)

As well as the permanent and other outdoor equipment (described above) available at the session there was an extensive supply of Lego plus a container of the wooden construction equipment similar in purpose to Lego, wooden blocks, trucks and other toys, a selection of puzzles (about a dozen different puzzles were available at this and all other sessions observed during the fieldwork period; the selection was changed regularly), books displayed on a portable wooden bookstand, cotton reels and thread for the younger children, painting easels, brushes, containers of paint, and paper, dough, plus oven, biscuit cutters and rolling pins (the rolling pins had recently been constructed by a Waimate person; each one had been crafted from a different variety of native timber and then treated with edible oil), a wooden tray (on a stand) containing a mixture of flour, macaroni and barley and a selection of containers and sifters, the mobile unit's 'theme' board (on this occasion carrying colourful pictures of the week's theme on caterpillars and butterflies), and a wide selection of collage materials (and including scissors, sellotape, staplers, and paints different from those used when painting at the easel).

Sixteen of the 22 children who attended the session were aged two-and-a-half years or more (ie old enough to be officially enrolled) although there seemed to be several who had only just turned $2^1/_2$ years. The remaining six children included a very young baby and five children aged between about 15 months and 2 years 4 months. (Most of these last-mentioned children took part in several activities, along with the older children; eg they played at the flour table and listened to stories.)

The session (in common with all sessions held by the Waimate mobile pre-school unit) was organised, weather permitting, so that, prior to the large group activity near the end of the session, one teacher worked most of the time with children outside while the other teacher worked inside.

On this occasion, the teacher who worked inside was primarily responsible for looking after and encouraging children participating in the two theme activities. (The first of these activities involved making caterpillars - using egg cartons, green paint, pieces of cardboard or pipe-cleaners for feelers and buttons for eyes - while the second activity was making 'fold-and-close' butterfly pictures. In this latter task, each child was given a piece of paper with one half of a butterfly drawn on one side of the paper; the children then painted the half butterfly and folded the paper in two so that the paint was transferred to the other side of the paper, thus completing the full symmetrical butterfly shape.) The 'inside teacher' also spent time hanging up completed butterflies or paintings to dry on pegs attached to a 'clothes-line' arrangement and, in between working with children on the theme activities, spent some time in the book-corner reading to two or three of the younger children.

The other teacher worked outside almost all of the time prior to the group activity (except for a short time spent with two children working with puzzles), dividing her time between children playing at the flour table and those undertaking carpentry; she also carried out general supervision - for example, of children on the climbing equipment. At one point this teacher told the story of 'The Hungry Caterpillar' to a group of interested children - about 12 in all. (It was decided to have the story-time outside at this session both because the weather was pleasant and because it was a good way of getting away from the noise made by parents chatting and by other children at play.) As she told about all the many things that the hungry caterpillar ate, the teacher illustrated the story with pictures displayed on a felt board. Throughout the story, she encouraged the children to participate by asking them questions and, when she had finished the tale, by allowing children turns to take down the felt board pictures as she asked for them.

Both teachers made a point of talking individually to as many children as they could. They also spent considerable time explaining things to the children; for example, at this and all other sessions during the observation week they concentrated on aspects of biology relating to caterpillars and the whys and wherefores of how they eventually become butterflies. (They were also heard to talk about days of the week, colours, and numbers to different children while working with them on one or other of the activities available at the session.)

Neither of the teachers spent time at this session with children who were playing with Lego and other small motor equipment although two of the parents did so briefly.

At about 10.15am, the parents set up tables and chairs on the grass so that the children could continue to enjoy the mild weather by having their morning tea outside. There was no requirement for the children to all sit down together: once the refreshments (on this occasion, fruit juice and plain, sweet biscuits) had been set out, the children could come and help themselves as they wished and return to play when they had finished. (All adults present had a cup of tea and a biscuit at the same time as the children although the teachers drank and ate theirs 'on the run'. The parents - and the grandmother present - had their tea on the verandah which ran along the front of the cottage, sitting on long wooden bench seats where they could keep the children in view.) Almost everybody had had their morning tea by 10.30am - there seemed to be an 'unwritten law' that everybody had their refreshments within a certain time to allow for everything to be washed and packed up again well before the end of the session. (The station owner's little pet dog paid a visit during the morning break but was so enthusiastic and boisterous - plus he tried to steal the children's biscuits - that he had to be sent home!)

At around 11am teachers, parents, and children packed away some activities ready for when the children worked together as a group in the more spacious of the cottage's two rooms.

The large group session, led by both teachers, was attended by all but three or four of the youngest children. To avoid overcrowding and undue noise, most parents remained either in the kitchen or out on the verandah while the group activities were in progress. (Three parents - two with toddlers on their lap - remained in order to observe proceedings.)

The group exercised to music (which was provided by the head teacher on the newly installed piano), sang (including action songs and finger plays), and listened to a story. There was also a short discussion about the session theme and what the children had worked on throughout the morning. Finally, older children who had completed tasks in their 'homework' books were invited to talk in front of the group about what they had done. Two four-year-olds had brought along their homework books and, in response to the teacher's questions, talked enthusiastically about the work they had completed. (The teachers encouraged parents of older children at all of their groups to work at home with their child. The teachers wrote suggestions in scrapbooks for these families, for example, to cut out and stick in pictures from magazines or to write and illustrate a brief story together, either about something that had happened to them since the last meeting or about the topic of the following week's theme, which the parents were advised of in advance.)

Shortly after the session ended at 11.30am, the public health nurse called in to thank the teachers for their part in passing on information about the hepatitis B immunisation programme which was taking place nationwide. She felt that the high percentage of families in the vicinity who had had their children immunised could, in large part, be attributed to the mobile unit teachers. The public health nurse also spent a few minutes talking with parents before going on her way.

The teachers completed packing the van, finally leaving the venue at 11.50am.

Parents

Twelve caregivers (11 mothers and one grandmother) remained throughout the session. One other woman was present for the first half hour but had to leave for a prenatal check-up at the hospital. (Her pre-schooler was to return home with one of the other parents.) Parents were responsible for helping with general supervision of all children, especially the very youngest ones, and for preparing the morning tea. There were two parents rostered for duty.

Approximately half of the parents present at the session interacted in some way with the children - ie they facilitated play by working and talking with children at the carpentry table and with those who were painting. They also assisted the children by taking off or putting on aprons and hanging up paintings to dry. Often, however, they simply responded to something their child said in passing.

Almost all parents involved themselves in some other way as well during the session, for example, helping to prepare the children's snack, and/or set out the tables for morning tea. A few mothers helped to unpack equipment at the beginning of the session although the teachers had already completed most of it before any parents arrived. Other parents helped carry equipment out to the van at the end of the session (at the teachers' request, parents did not attempt to pack the van because the teachers had a system which they felt worked best when only they loaded the van). Some parents were also observed to tidy up at various stages during the morning; it was the parents' responsibility to keep the cottage clean.

Although parents spent a lot of time chatting to one another, they also supervised their children reasonably well (apart from one or two occasions when they became so involved in their conversations that the teachers had to remind them to check on their children). At this session, some of the parents' time was taken up with completing the parent questionnaires for the study which the head teacher and the researcher had given out early in the session. (One of the teachers pointed out that this perhaps had an affect on parents' 'normal' behaviour during sessions - ie that because they were attending to the questionnaires they spent less time than usual interacting with the children.) Several parents discussed the questionnaires together. One of the parents thanked the researcher for the opportunity to express her (very positive) views about the mobile unit via the questionnaire.

A number of parents were interested to learn that there are only nine mobile units throughout the country. Others were very surprised to hear that there were so few because, based on their own experience, they felt that there must be a great need for mobile units in such isolated areas as Northland and the West Coast. Several parents commented, too, that they felt they could not do without the mobile unit and that it was "absolutely marvellous" - both for their children who would otherwise seldom get to see or interact with other children their own age, and for themselves because of the opportunity it provided to meet with other parents.

During the session, the head teacher spent 10 minutes or more talking exclusively to one parent about problems she (the parent) was having with her children. The problems seemed to be causing the mother considerable worry and stress.

IKIWAI: TUESDAY AFTERNOON, 15 MARCH 1988

After leaving the Hakataramea Valley group the teachers drove the 46 kilometres to Ikiwai, arriving there at 12.55pm. The teachers took a cut lunch on Tuesdays and, weather permitting, customarily picnicked in a quiet wayside spot en route to Ikiwai. The teachers enjoyed being able to take their short break between sessions in such scenic countryside.

Facilities Available to the Group

The Ikiwai group rented the local community hall for its session each week. (The parents were responsible for raising the money to pay the rental fee.) Because the group did not have sole use of the building, they were not able to display any posters or children's art work on the walls. The group held sessions in the long, narrow supper room because they felt that the hall itself was far too big, cold, and dark for comfort. Although the supper room had mats on the floor and was more compact than the main hall, it too seemed quite dark and gloomy due to high ceilings, and windows set too high up in the walls to see out of. The teachers said that the shape of the room also made it difficult to arrange equipment satisfactorily and that it did not lend itself to innovative presentation of activities. (The teachers, for example, remarked that, at one stage, they had tried to set up a 'family/dolls' corner' but had found that it was just not possible in the limited space available. They had found that they just had to work with what they had and do the best possible in the circumstances. To make more room in the supper room during the winter months when everybody - children and parents - had to stay inside, making conditions very congested, they were considering setting out the blocks and similar equipment in the kitchen, although again the likelihood of it being too cold there for the children was something they knew they would have to deal with.)

IKAWAI MEMORIAL

The Ikiwai Memorial Hall

Two weeks prior to the observation period the teachers had begun to use a little room off the main hall for their large group music/games activity. They had tried holding this activity in the main hall but found that, apart from it being very cold in winter, the hall echoed too much, making the noise level untenable; they also found that there was too much space to allow for a feeling of group unity. As there was no room in the supper room for a large group activity - especially when there were several adults and toddlers all inside too - the teachers were therefore experimenting by using the small back room. Although no sun reached this room and it was dark and dreary, the teachers felt that it was a positive move because they were able to proceed without interruptions from toddlers and other children who did not want to join in, and from parents who sometimes disrupted proceedings by talking in the background. (The children did not seem to mind their surroundings and during the session which was observed in the course of this study were participating fully in the singing and games.) A problem still to be solved was that of heating this room during the winter - the teachers were going to work on ways of doing this safely, perhaps getting electric heaters installed on the walls so that there would be no danger of children falling onto a heater at floor level in a confined space.

The outdoor play area consisted of an area of gravel immediately outside the doors to the supper room and a stretch of grass along one side of the hall. There were two swings but, as these were a considerable distance from the entrance to the hall, they did not seem to attract the children. A small sandpit closer to the hall entrance was more popular (although the teachers said that the sand which had been used - a coarse, dark gold sand - tended to stain the children's clothes and was not the best choice). Other outdoor equipment included wooden cable reels of varying sizes and climbing apparatus which included a rope 'net'.

The teachers were able to drive the van right up to the steps of the hall which made unloading and loading of equipment much more straightforward than at the Hakataramea group where it was necessary to carry everything from the gate right across the yard and into the house.

The Session

Twelve children attended the session; nine of whom were of enrolled age ($2^1/_2$ years or over). The remaining children included a baby and two toddlers.

As there were adult-sized tables and chairs permanently set up in the supper room and space was limited, the teachers had to put puzzles (the same as those used at the morning session at Hakataramea) and collage materials out on these tables. This made these activities less visible and therefore less accessible to the children; generally, it seemed to need adult assistance and encouragement to get children started on these activities because of the height of the tables and chairs. Other activities, such as dough and the 'theme' activities (making a caterpillar and the fold-and-close butterfly task) for the week were set out on the mobile unit's (child-sized) fold-up tables.

Immediately inside the door from the outside area, the teachers placed the portable book-corner and a mat for the children to sit on while looking at the books. Easels and painting supplies were available at the other end of the room.

Outside, as well as the box of toys for using in the sandpit, the carpentry table was made available as was a tray filled with flour and dried lentils. The teachers had brought along sifters and a variety of small containers for using in the flour. As it was warmer than it had been during the morning, the teachers decided to make the water tank available as well. They filled it with warm, soapy water and provided water wheels and funnels. In order to promote large motor activity, the teachers placed a plank of wood between two cable reels of equal size so that children could walk from one to the other; a smaller cable reel was placed close enough for children to be able to climb down on to it, while a ladder attached to one of the two larger cable reels gave added variety to the climbing 'structure'.

As usual, during the portion of the session devoted to free play, one teacher remained inside while the other teacher supervised and interacted with children outside.

A small group of children spent time working with the flour, using sifters and filling and emptying containers; a shower of rain brought this activity to a rather abrupt halt, however. The teacher had to hurriedly take the tray of flour inside before it became a sticky mess in the rain. Although the shower stopped some minutes later and the flour activity was again made available outside (there was not room to accommodate it inside) the children had moved on to other pursuits and did not return to it on this occasion. Only one child chose to work at the carpentry table. Two or three children played at the water tank but this did not seem to have its usual appeal today, perhaps because the weather became increasingly more overcast and dull as the session progressed and there were occasional brief showers. Four children (two of whom were under three years of age) spent 20 minutes or so climbing on the cable reels and also on the rope net. The 'outside' teacher remained with them throughout, giving considerable assistance and encouragement, especially to the younger ones. Most children, however, chose to remain inside for much of the afternoon working on activities there, perhaps because of the weather although more probably because they were enjoying what was available inside.

As well as telling the story of The Hungry Caterpillar (illustrating it as she went by means of coloured figures stuck onto a felt board) to two different groups (four to five children in each case), the teacher working inside at this session also read a story to a small group of children in the book-corner. The majority of her time, however, was devoted to helping successive small groups of children make caterpillars out of egg cartons (etc) and to

The flour activity, Ikiwai

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complete the fold-and-close butterfly activity described in the account of the previous session at Hakataramea. The 'outside' teacher also helped with this when it rained and everyone had to go inside. Both teachers played a 'caterpillar' board game (using dice and counters) with different children after giving instructions on the rules and procedures of the game.

Two children, prompted by suggestions written in their homework books at the previous week's session (the teachers liked to encourage parents and children to talk at home together about upcoming or past themes for sessions), brought along a small creature in a jar. One brought a praying mantis and the other, a snail. Each of these children conversed with one or other of the teachers about their 'catch' and then, encouraged by the teachers, showed their 'creepy crawlies' to other children. The teachers involved the other children in observing and talking about features of each of these bugs and had the children look at and discuss the 'theme board' which, this week, featured coloured pictures of the life-cycle of a butterfly.

The parents prepared afternoon tea for themselves, the teachers and the children; this was made available from 2.10pm until about 2.30pm with everybody helping themselves when they were ready rather than having to have it together. There was fruit juice and crackers and cheese for the children and freshly baked pikelets with raspberry jam for the adults which the parent on duty had brought along. The teachers did not stop to have a break but drank their tea while carrying on with other duties such as sitting and talking with children at the dough table or admiring a child's completed painting.

Throughout the session both teachers made a point of spending as much time as they could with one child whom they described as 'developmentally slow'. Although almost three years of age, she did not speak and seemed to have a very short attention span. The teachers therefore addressed her often, making sure they had the child's attention by establishing eye contact. The head teacher also held the child on her knee throughout most of the music session while, at another point, the other teacher talked to her about a feather she had found and encouraged the child to blow on the feather. She was successful in getting the child to attend long enough to follow instructions and do this.

About 2.45pm the teachers and most children went into the little back room for singing and games. As there was no piano available, the group sang along to tape-recorded music. The children were also given the opportunity to request songs (eg 'Baa Baa Black Sheep'); these they sang unaccompanied. Following a period during which they pretended to be caterpillars, the group played a game in which one of the teachers hid each child in turn under a blanket and had the remaining children try and guess who was 'missing'. The group activity ended with 'Show-and-Tell' time, whereby two of the older children talked with a teacher about what they had done in their homework book during the week. The children were rather quiet and shy on this occasion, generally just nodding or smiling at what the teachers said rather than responding verbally (although each made one or two comments). Once the teacher had gone through the 'homework' with the individual child she talked about it with the group as a whole. The teachers said goodbye to the children at 3.03pm - the end of the large group session; after some further minutes spent talking (a few other parents who had come to collect their children were also present) most parents and children began leaving the hall about 3.10pm.

Much of the equipment had been packed and carried over to the van before and during the music and games session so the teachers were able to quickly load everything into the van at the end of the session. The mobile van was returned to its garage in Waimate at 3.45pm.

Parents

Eleven parents remained throughout the session. The parents at this group seemed to spend considerably less time working with their children than the parents associated with the Hakataramea group had. (The teachers commented, however, that because 'Parent Questionnaires' for the study had been distributed and several parents chose to complete them during the session, this probably reduced the time that these parents would otherwise have spent with the children.) About six parents worked briefly with the children throughout the afternoon (eg one mother was observed to read to her child, another to help her child make a caterpillar, while a third threaded cotton reels onto string for her baby to play with). Other than carrying out some housekeeping duties (at the teachers' request, three parents cleaned the paint brushes while another, who had arrived early enough to unlock the hall, helped unpack the van and set up the session), they spent most of the time chatting to one another: clearly, it was an opportunity to meet and talk which they thoroughly enjoyed. (Three or four parents commented to the researcher that coming along to mobile unit sessions was almost the only opportunity that they had to go out socially and that they very much appreciated being able to see the other parents.)

On at least two different occasions the teachers were observed to offer information to parents - for example, one parent asked for advice on suitable toys to provide for her child while another talked with a teacher about ways to facilitate dramatic play. Three parents also chose to observe during part of the music and games period.

OTAIO
COMMUNITY
CENTRE

The hall used by the Otaio group

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OTAIO: WEDNESDAY MORNING, 16 MARCH 1988

The teachers left their base at 8.35am and arrived at the Otaio venue at 8.55am. Otaio, a predominantly farming community, is situated north of Waimate towards Timaru via the principal southern highway.

Facilities Available to the Group

As at the previous venue, the Otaio group met in the local community hall, a reasonably modern building made from concrete blocks.

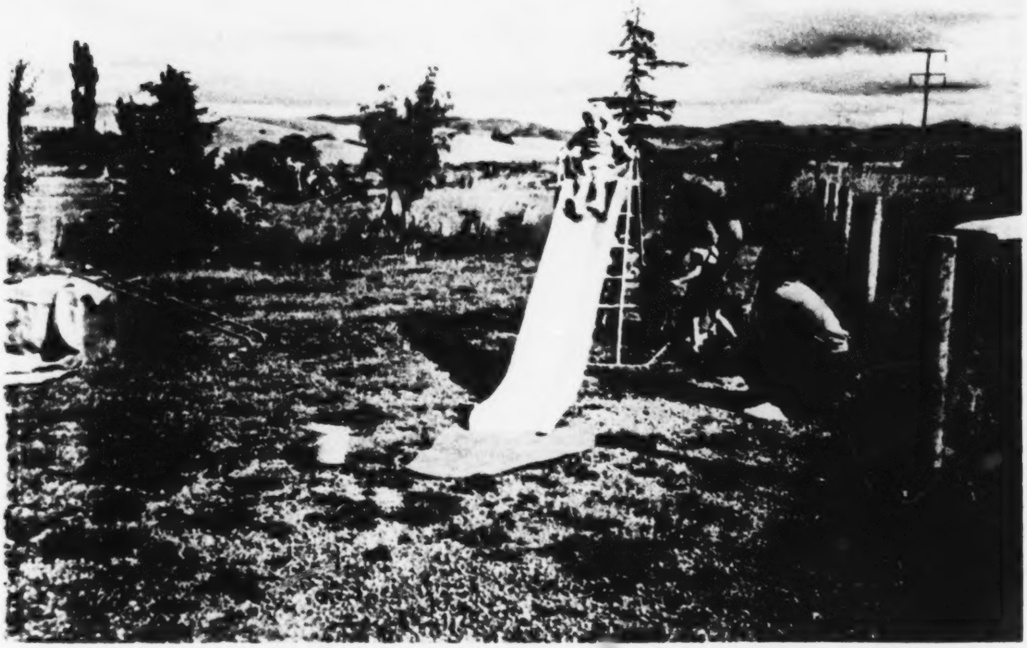
The hall consisted of one large main room, a kitchen, an entrance way, and men's and women's toilets.

The interior walls had been painted white but as this had been poorly done (the previous, darker paintwork showed through) the effect was dingy. The hall contained a stage with a piano on it, and some (adult-sized) tables and chairs. As the hall was borrowed accommodation no art work or posters were able to be pinned on the walls to relieve the bareness and lack of colour. (The group did, however, leave paintings out on the stage to dry between sessions. These were then collected by their owners the following week.) The floor was wooden and uncarpeted but the teachers put down the mats which they carried in the van in strategic places so the children had something to sit on while undertaking activities. As the furniture available in the hall was, as at Ikiwai, again adult- rather than child-sized, this meant that some activities were not visible to the children until they had climbed - or been lifted up - onto the chairs. Although drab, and not designed with pre-schoolers in mind, their surroundings did not seem to worry the children at all; they appeared to be well satisfied to be together with their peers and to work and play with activities that they did not have at home.

The teachers were able to back the van close to the main entrance to the hall in order to unload equipment but once this was complete the door was locked so that children could not get out onto the road. A second door on the other side of the hall gave access to the outdoor play area which was securely fenced.

The area available for outdoor play was generous, extending along one side of the hall. Except for a concreted area immediately outside the back entrance to the building it was all grass (although the ground was rough and patches of gravel showed through in places). The

Flour play and listening to the story of the 'Hungry Caterpillar', Otaio



Parents supervising children using the swings, Otaio grounds were well-fenced and contained a sandpit, slide, and metal climbing frames. The outlook was an attractive one which included trees, paddocks, and rolling hills.

The Session

Parents and children arrived in 'dribs and drabs' over an approximately half hour period but by 9.30am all 19 children (including two babies and three children under $2^1/_2$ years of age) and 10 parents who attended the session were present. Children began playing with whatever was available as soon as they arrived. For instance, even though the unpacking of the van had not been completed, at 9.05am three children were already working at the dough table.

The activities and equipment available during this session were very similar to those at the previous day's sessions at Hakataramea and Ikiwai. The structure of the session was also very similar - ie although the first half of the morning was free play, the main focus of this time was on encouraging the children to take part in the 'theme' activities (listening to the story of 'The Hungry Caterpillar', making a caterpillar, and completing a fold-and-close butterfly 'painting'). The latter part of the session was, as usual, devoted to large group activity (music and games). To supplement what the teachers brought on the van there was also a rocking horse, a toy oven, some dolls and prams, a large, gaily-painted wooden engine, and a selection of dressing up clothes. These were all stored at the hall between sessions.

Although overcast, the weather was fine and quite suitable for outdoor play. The children therefore divided their time between indoor and outdoor activities. The water tank was not made available at this session, however, because the teachers felt that despite the fine weather it was too chilly for water play (especially for the toddlers present).

As well as supervising children undertaking climbing and similar pursuits (further mentioned below) the teacher on 'outside duty' divided her time between children undertaking carpentry, and those working at the flour tray and in the sandpit, playing in the hut (which the teachers had constructed by draping a large piece of sacking over two large, sturdy wooden boxes), 'painting' the building (using buckets of water and wide brushes), or using the trolley.

The teacher on 'inside duty' spent a few minutes talking with children at the dough table at the beginning of the session but was then kept busy helping children with their butterfly pictures and caterpillars. (A small number of children also chose to make other constructions out of the available collage materials.) She also narrated - and illustrated with felt pictures of the main 'characters' - the story of the 'Hungry Caterpillar' to a group of eight children outside (allowing each child in turn to take a felt picture down from the board at the end of the story and store it in the box designed for the purpose), and read stories on two different occasions to three or four children in each case. During one of these stories she involved the children by getting them to do finger plays appropriate to the tale.

Both teachers also talked to parents while they worked and carried out 'caregiving' duties (eg putting aprons on children before they engaged in messy activities, tying shoelaces, comforting children who had bumped into something or tripped over, helping one or two children wash their hands for morning tea, sorting out completed work from the previous session, and general tidying up after the children as they worked.

Morning tea was a 'rolling' affair; after clearing one or two of the portable tables brought on the van, the parents on duty set out fruit juice and crackers and cheese for the children on these at 10.30am. They also prepared tea or coffee and biscuits for the adults.

Compared with groups observed earlier in the week children at this group, rather than engaging in solitary or parallel play, played noticeably more often together. The teachers stated that families which attended this group were part of a close-knit community whose members even went on holiday together. They felt, therefore, that because the children knew each other well this went a long way towards explaining why there was more interaction amongst the children. (They also commented, however, that the closeness of the group was sometimes a problem when children outside the community joined the group. They said that the previous week, for example, they had had to talk to different children on several occasions because they were deliberately excluding and picking on two children from one of the other groups visited by the mobile unit - the parents of these children sometimes brought them along to sessions at Otaio as well in order to increase the amount of pre-school education they received each week.)

Three children had minor falls when playing on the climbing equipment outside. This seemed to occur because the parents who were responsible for supervising them, as they became more engrossed in their conversation with other parents, forgot to attend as closely as they should. The head teacher therefore took over the supervision of children undertaking climbing and other active outdoor pursuits. She also found it necessary to explain safety matters to various children and why it was not appropriate (for example) to jump on the crawl tunnel rather than crawl through it in the usual way. (One persistent child had to be told more than once not to do this.)

At 11am the group gathered for general discussion (one topic covered by the group was that of 'spiders'), music, and a game. Both teachers, as usual, joined forces during this time, one teacher joining in with the children but also supervising, encouraging and helping them while the other played the piano or, during the game of guessing who was 'missing' from the group, hiding each child in turn under the blanket. The maximum number of children to participate in the large group activity was 14. Some of the younger children also chose to take a break part way through when they became restless. (One child who was really too young to attend for the necessary period was disruptive from time to time. The head teacher had to explain to the parent that rather than insist that her child took part she brought him in for a short time only and then took him out again to play elsewhere. The mother agreed.)

Following 'Show-and-Tell' time in which four children displayed their homework books first to one of the teachers and then to the group as a whole, the teachers handed out completed paintings, butterflies etc to their owners before saying goodbye to the group.

The session ended at 11.30am. The teachers left for the session at Southburn at 11.40am, after completing the packing of the van. Several parents were still at the hall chatting when the teachers drove away; their children continued playing together.

Parents

Ten parents remained throughout the morning. During sessions, parents at this group customarily congregated in the kitchen - where there were several tables and chairs - to chat together. The teachers reported that sessions were an important social occasion for these parents and, compared with some of their other groups, parents did not usually spend a great deal of time interacting with - or supervising - children during the session, apart from tending to their babies and some of the very young toddlers who generally stayed close to their mothers. On this occasion, however, two or three parents were observed to help children who were playing outside, eg those using the slide. The parents on duty prepared morning tea for children and adults and cleaned up again afterwards. They also helped with some preliminary packing up while the music/games session was underway and 10 parents completed a 'Parent Questionnaire' (these were handed out, at the head teacher's request by one of the parent committee members).

Several parents were interested in the study and came and asked the researcher about it. One commented that she hoped they "were up to scratch" while three or four others commented that they would hate to think that the mobile unit would be abolished.

Comments from the Teacher Diaries[3]

Best/worst things about the session:

> ***"The best thing was that it was a lovely sunny day which encouraged the children to play together as a group. Excellent cooperative play by the older children. A great response from one child who has shown fear of going through the tunnel. He got the courage to go from the small tunnel to the large one."***

SOUTHBURN: WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON, 16 MARCH 1988

Southburn, another farming community north of Waimate, was the location of the Wednesday afternoon session.

Facilities Available to the Group

The group met in the local community hall which, although an old building, was this time pleasant and light inside, unlike the venues for some of the other groups. The hall was situated close to the primary school. As well as the main room (where the session was set up), there was a kitchen-supper room area, toilet facilities, and a small room containing a piano. (The group was able to store its belongings in the small room between sessions.)

Although large, the outdoor area (all grass), was not fenced all the way around. This meant that the group had to make use of a portable, plastic mesh fence - which they erected at each session - to portion off just a section of the available space for their use. The teachers felt that the area that they usually used was too small and were intending to try 'fencing off' a different part of the grounds surrounding the hall in an attempt to get more room. Local parents had had a sandpit constructed but, other than some cable reels of varying sizes, there was no other permanent outdoor equipment for the pre-schoolers.

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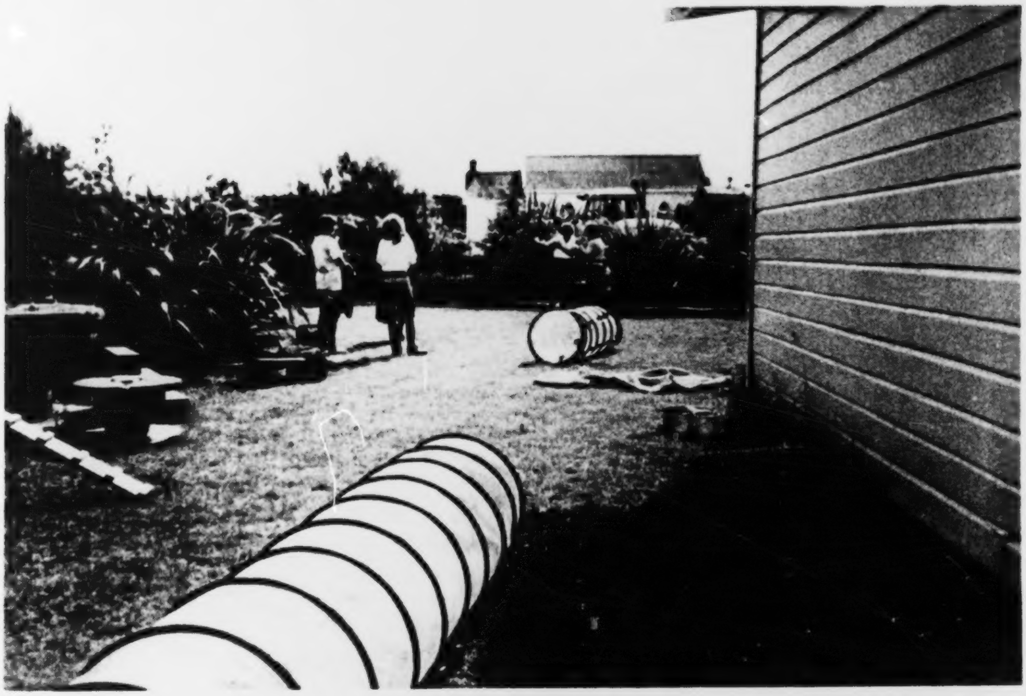
[3] Comments from the 'Teacher Diaries' quoted on this page are those made in the week following the fieldwork period.

The hall used by the Southburn group

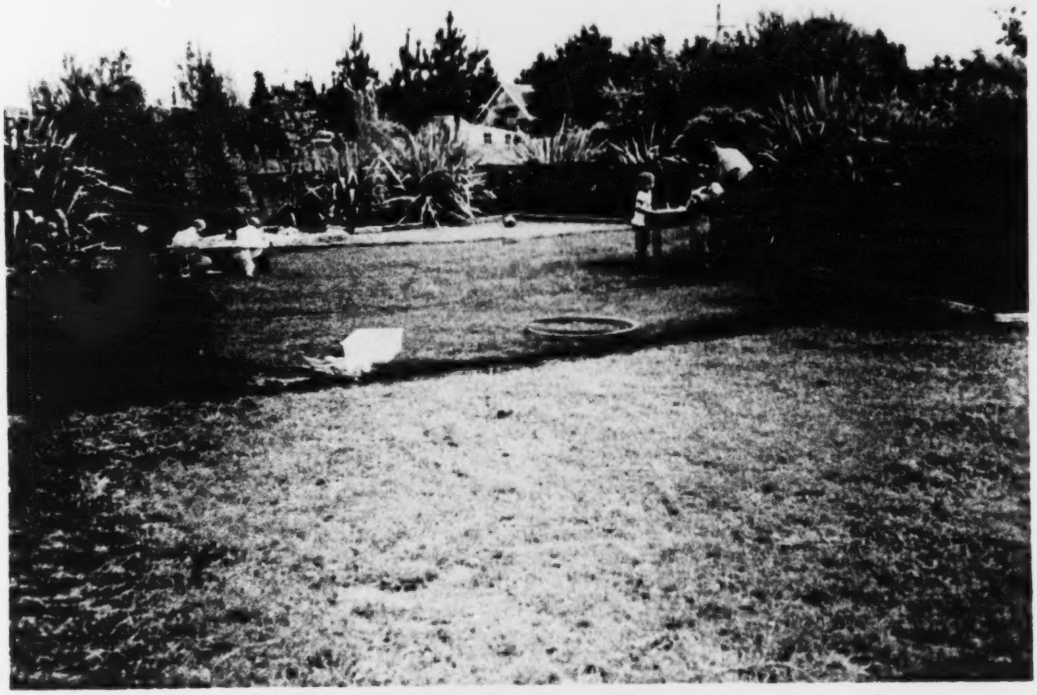
The Session

It was a sunny afternoon which made it pleasant both inside the hall and outside. Twenty children attended the session; 13 were old enough to be officially enrolled while the remainder included three babies and four toddlers. (The toddlers did not attempt to make a caterpillar or a fold-and-close butterfly picture but took part in any other activities that they were capable of such as painting and building with Lego.)

Overall, the session followed the same format as the three sessions already described. The equipment and activities brought on the van were supplemented by a supply of dressing up clothes, telephones, screens (in order to section off a corner of the hall as a 'family corner'), dolls, dolls' prams and cot, a wooden rocker, a set of wooden steps and a ladder for climbing on and off the cable reels, some tables and chairs suitable for pre-schoolers, and a small clothesline on which to peg the children's paintings to dry.



Outdoor facilities at Southburn showing the portable fence



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At this group, activities such as puzzles were able to be set out on long, low wooden bench seats rather than out of reach on high tables as was the case at the Ikiwai and Otaio venues. Also, as there was plenty of room and the group had some child-sized tables and chairs of its own to supplement what was brought on the van, all other activities were able to be made available in such a way that they were easily accessible to the children. As was customary at all venues, the teachers - and parents - spread large pieces of black polythene on the floor (which was of polished wood) to protect it from glue and paint and other materials likely to make a mess; they also put mats down by the book corner and where the children worked with Lego and blocks.

Both teachers spent a lot of time talking to the children while working with them on the different activities. Many of these country children seemed quiet and shy but, although they did not always respond verbally, at least not initially, they frequently nodded or smiled at something the teachers said to them. (There were, however, two or three children who had short conversations with the teachers.)

As well as listening to the story of the 'Hungry Caterpillar' and taking part in the theme activities for the day, children variously spent their time working at the dough table, building with Lego and blocks and playing with a selection of wooden toys, playing a board game with an adult and one or more of their peers, doing puzzles, playing in the sandpit and at the water tank, sifting flour and 'cooking', climbing up and down the ladder to the biggest cable reel, crawling through the tunnels (there were two available at this session), rolling hula-hoops around the outdoor play area (three boys participated, often stopping to compare notes on the best way to do this), taking turns to drag each other around on the large piece of sacking from the van, and using the trolley. Brushes and buckets for filling with water in order to 'paint' the hall were again available but no child chose to make use of them at this session.

Water play, Southburn

During the session, the head teacher spent 10 minutes or so enrolling a new parent and her child and explaining aspects of the mobile unit.

Although the adults at this group chose not to have afternoon tea for themselves during sessions they always prepared a snack for the children. Today this was fruit juice and biscuits which were set out on one of the tables from the van about 2.35pm. Shortly after the last children had had their snack, they were invited to take part in the group session led by both teachers. The group met in the small back room (where the piano was kept) for singing and then moved into the main hall to play the 'hiding and guessing game' and for pretending to be caterpillars.

Almost all of the children joined in during the music and games session although a few chose to leave for brief spells before returning again. While the teachers encouraged all children of enrolled age to take part they still regarded it as a voluntary activity. The session ended at 3.06pm, after the last child had finished telling the rest of the group what s/he had done in her/his homework book.

By the time the teachers had talked to parents and completed packing the van it was 3.20pm; they arrived back in Waimate at approximately 3.45pm. After one of the teachers had completed the mileage running sheet, the van was left at the garage just down the road from their office in the town kindergarten.

Parents

Parents had unlocked the hall by the time the teachers arrived at 12.55pm and had put down mats on the floor (these were stored at the hall) ready for the teachers to set out activities and equipment from the van.

It was observed that most parents (12 women remained for all or almost all of the session) interacted to at least some extent with children throughout the afternoon. For example, they encouraged children working with puzzles and at the dough table, played a caterpillar board game (using counters and dice) with two or three children, and read stories to small groups or individual children throughout the morning. They also kept some of the smaller toddlers happily occupied with Lego, blocks, and other toys. (The teachers had to remind three parents to take care to ensure that the smallest children did not put beads into their mouths.)

Of the two parents rostered for duty, one helped by supervising outside while the other supervised children inside, freeing the teachers to work more closely with small groups and individual children.

About half an hour before the end of the session, the parents cleared away the mats and some of the equipment and tables so that there was enough space for the (older) children to proceed with music and games. The parents were responsible for the final tidy-up and for locking the hall at the end of the session.

As well as the duties outlined above, parents were able to spend a greater part of the session chatting. Local men, tar-sealing the road outside the hall, also created a diversion for the mothers. (The children, on the other hand, took very little notice of the road-works.)

The 'Sunday school hall used by the Morven group, showing the generous outdoor space available

MORVEN: THURSDAY MORNING, 17 MARCH 1988

Morven, a small township situated south-east of Waimate towards Oamaru, caters for the farming community which surrounds it. Most of the families which made use of the mobile pre-school unit service in the area were either farm owners, farm workers, or shearers although a few families who lived in or near the township itself were in other occupations.

Facilities Available to the Group

The Morven group met in the Sunday School Hall situated within the grounds of one of the local churches. The hall was a very old, red brick building consisting of one main room (about half the size of a typical community hall) and a kitchen. Although the hall was still being used as a Sunday school[4] this occurred only about once a month; for this reason, the mobile unit group were able to leave a considerable amount of equipment set up in the hall between sessions. They were also able to put some of the children's art work on the walls to supplement the few old pictures which had been put up by Sunday school teachers in years gone by.

The interior of the hall was of yellow, pink and cream painted brick walls, wooden doors and lower wall panels stained dark brown, green ceiling, brown and cream coloured curtains, and a wooden floor - although a large carpet square covered the greater part of the floor in the main hall. The ceiling was high and steeply sloping and windows were few, necessitating the lights being turned on at all times. The overall impression at this venue was of rather quaint, 'olde worlde' charm. The lack of room inside the building, however, caused problems during sessions, especially when all parents and children had to be inside at once due to adverse weather. (Potentially, there could be 22 children and 22 parents present at a given session which meant that, even if some people remained in the kitchen to work and talk, conditions became very cramped indeed.)

The equipment belonging to this group and left in the hall between sessions included items which formed the 'family corner' (tall screens, an oven, a tea-set arranged on a low table, an extensive selection of dressing up clothes and accessories, a wooden rack for draping clothes over, and a collection of dolls of varying sizes and types), a box of assorted toys, materials for collage work, wooden blocks, and a small clothesline which could be used to hang children's paintings to dry.

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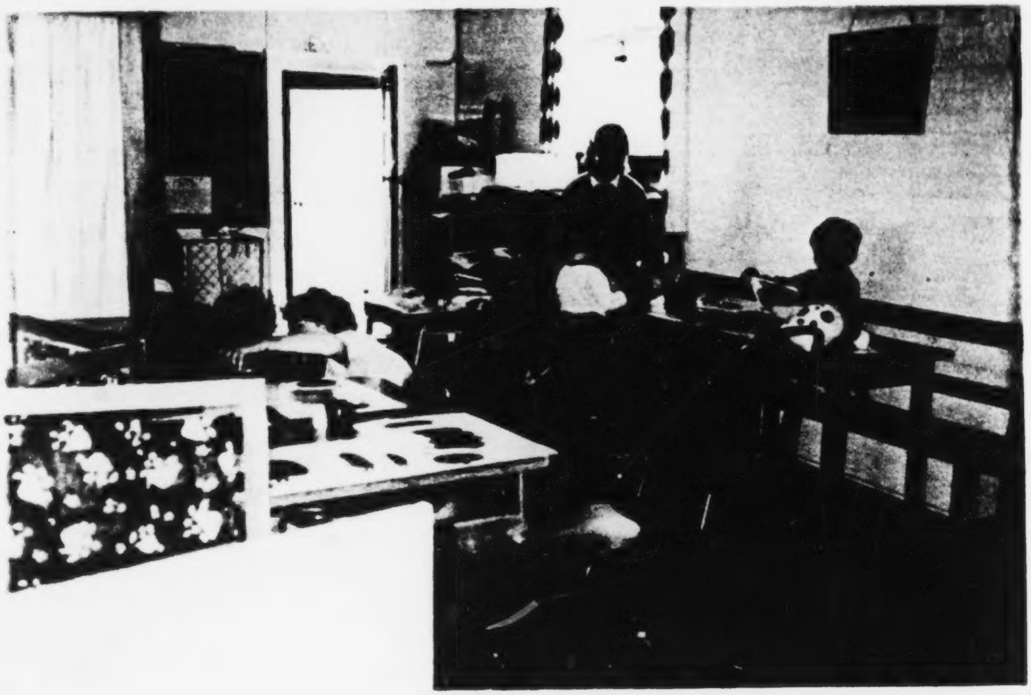
[4] The teachers and parents had been advised, however, that the Sunday school group was soon to move to alternative premises which would mean that the mobile unit had sole use of the hall. When this happened, the teachers intended to reorganise the way in which furniture and equipment had been placed in the hall in an attempt to maximise available space.

Interior views of the Morven venue



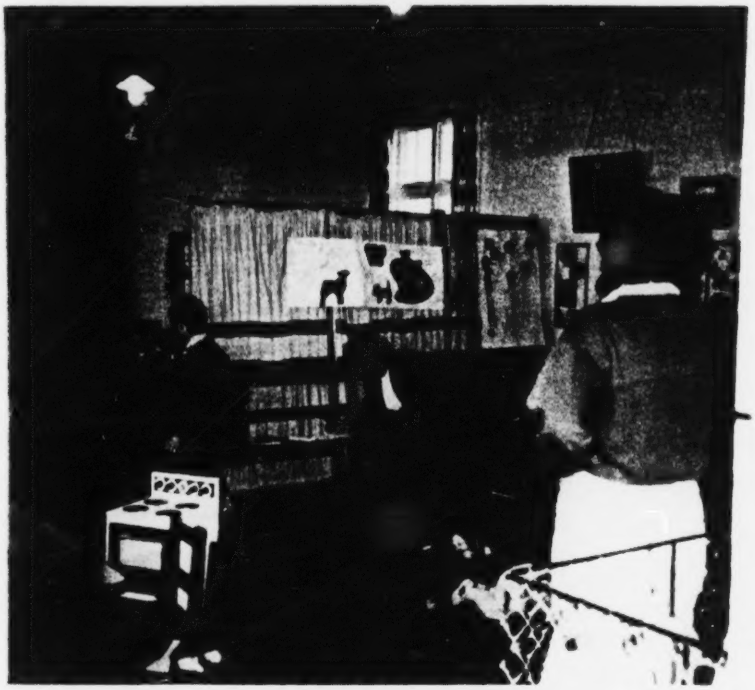
Permanent furniture and fixtures in the main room included adult-sized tables and chairs, wooden bench seats, some lower screens than those used in the family corner, a piano, electric heaters attached to the wall well out of the children's reach, and a blackboard.

The kitchen was large enough for some activities to be set out there (eg on this occasion a painting easel with containers of paint and brushes placed on a nearby wooden bench seat were made available as were the wooden tray table containing flour and dried lentils, and, on one of the portable, fold-up tables from the van, paper, glue, and materials suitable for collage work. The walls of the kitchen had been painted pink (like the main room, the interior walls were again of brick), and the floor covered with multi-coloured linoleum. As well as some cupboards beneath the sink-bench, there was a Zip unit for heating water and a fireplace surrounded by a child-proof guard. Toilet facilities were reached via the kitchen and, as well as the connecting door to the main room, there was a door leading outside. (Equipment from the van was brought inside through a door opening into the main room but once the van had been unpacked this door was kept shut - mainly because there was not enough room to have people keep opening it all the time but also because of the strong wind which was blowing - and access to the outdoor area was through the kitchen only.)

The Sunday school building shared the grounds belonging to the church. The securely-fenced property consisted of large, flat, beautifully tended lawns. There were also mature trees around the perimeter and an attractive view of hills and distant mountains beyond the hall. Although the teachers had to drive over a portion of the grass in order to get close enough to the hall to unpack the van easily, there was a concrete walking path leading from the gravel drive near the church to the Sunday School Hall. Parents associated with this group had had a generously-sized sandpit dug for the children; other 'permanent' outdoor equipment at this venue included a metal climbing frame with a rope net attached, a swing, and several cable reels of varying sizes.

The Session

The teachers left Waimate at 8.35am, arriving at the Morven venue at 9.03am. With the help of the two parents who had arrived before them, the van was able to be unpacked quickly with most of this completed five minutes after the teachers' arrival.



A view of the main hall from the kitchen, Morven

In the kitchen, Morven venue

There were 16 children (including a toddler and a baby) present throughout the morning. The dough and accompanying rolling pins, cutters and table were amongst the first items to be unpacked from the van. Immediately this equipment became available in the hall the children present at that stage began working with it.

For lack of an alternative place to put them, puzzles and the fold-and-close butterfly activity were set out on the adult-sized tables which were a permanent fixture in the hall. The materials with which to make a caterpillar, however, were able to be placed on a much lower table. (A caterpillar, as mentioned earlier in this case study, was made by turning an egg carton upside down, painting it green, attaching long feelers from strips of card and forming eyes either with paint or by glueing on buttons.) The teachers and the two 'duty parents', as usual, put the large pieces of black polythene down to protect the floor from paint and other substances likely to make a mess.

Due to an extremely cold, strong wind most people chose to remain inside throughout much of the session. The parents decided to light the fire in the kitchen which, despite being rather smokey every time an especially vigorous gust of wind forced its way down the chimney, made it seem cosy and welcoming. After morning tea, although the wind continued to blow as hard as ever, the sun came out and several of the children wanted to go outside to play in the sandpit and use the other outdoor equipment. The teacher on 'outside duty' at this session therefore unpacked the carpentry table and the crawl tunnel from the van, brought out the box of sandpit tools and the wooden steps and ladder, and rolled the cable reels into suitable positions for the children to climb between them. (Neither the children nor the teacher seemed concerned about the weather although the researcher's hands were numb with cold after just a short period of observation!)

Because of the weather, both teachers worked inside until after the morning tea break. During this period, one of the teachers divided her time between helping children on the theme activities of making a caterpillar and completing the fold-and-close butterfly task, telling the story of 'The Hungry Caterpillar', working with children in the puzzle corner, and reading a story in the family corner to five children. The book she chose to read was about a 'squiggly-wiggly worm', a topic relevant to the week's theme on 'bugs'. She also spoke to several parents as she worked, both on informal matters, and on matters related to the way in which they helped, and interacted with, the children. After morning tea this teacher went to supervise children outside. Once she had unpacked the outdoor equipment from the van (this had not been brought out earlier because, at first, it did not seem as if outdoor play would be possible) she spent her time pushing six different children on the swing and instructing one or two on how to use their legs in order to continue to use the swing unaided.

The swing was popular and several children stood and watched whoever was on the swing until it was their turn to use it again; fortunately, one of the parents came and gave the teacher a spell from pushing children on the swing. The teacher on 'outside duty' also worked with children making things at the carpentry table, talked to children in the sandpit, and supervised individual and small groups of children who were using the crawl tunnel and trolley, climbing on the rope net, and stepping between and jumping off the cable reels. She also chatted to several parents who had braved the wind for a short while to watch what the children were doing outside.

The other teacher remained inside throughout the session. Like the other teacher, she too told and illustrated 'The Hungry Caterpillar' story to two different groups of children during the period before morning tea. (Every time she told how the caterpillar had eaten its way through an item of food - such as a large piece of chocolate cake or some oranges - she would display a picture of the appropriate food up on the felt board. She then explained to a highly attentive group - as all children who had listened to the story during the observation week were - how the caterpillar grew bigger and bigger the more it ate until, finally, it grew into a beautiful butterfly.) When the story was finished she invited children, first stressing that they had to take turns, to take down one by one from the board the pictures she had used to illustrate the story. All children seemed eager to take part in this. The teacher, as well as helping children make caterpillars and butterflies (all but the baby and the youngest toddler took part in these activities) for much of the rest of the session, also divided her time between children at the dough and puzzle tables, and playing a 'caterpillar' board game (using counters and dice) with one child. As well, she made a point of talking to a quiet, shy child (eventually getting a verbal response from the child), and read stories to two different children. One of these children she held on her lap as she read; they discussed the story as they went and, prompted by the content of the story, the teacher took the opportunity to explain colours to the child. Each of these one-to-one interactions endured for around five minutes. (There were plenty of parents to supervise the other children inside; this group of parents also interacted with the children throughout the session.) The teacher was further observed to offer advice to a parent who was helping children painting at the easel out in the kitchen (eg on how and where to write a child's name on his or her painting).

Morning tea was available in the kitchen on a help-yourself-basis from 9.50am. The parents on duty had prepared Milo for the children and tea or coffee for the adults; everybody - child and adult alike - was also provided with a crispbread and cheese plus one sweet biscuit.

During the morning, one teacher took responsibility for looking through and stamping with 'smiling faces' work done in several children's homework books; she also, for the parents' benefit wrote in the books what the theme for the following week was to be. This was to give parents the opportunity to discuss the theme at home with their child and to stick in pictures or carry out some other activity relevant to the theme if they chose.

At around 11am the parents cleared away many of the activities (eg the Lego which had been placed on a mat in one corner and a variety of blocks and other small motor equipment) so that the teachers had some space in which to conduct the large group music and games period.

At the beginning of the large group session (there were between 11 and 13 children taking part in this at any given time) the teachers brought out the 'theme board' which displayed large, coloured pictures of the life-cycle of a butterfly. The teachers referred to the pictures as they explained how caterpillars developed into butterflies (or moths) and then encouraged children to make comments of their own. Following some group discussion, the group went on to sing some songs especially chosen to complement the session theme (eg they sang about the 'Fuzzy-Wuzzy Caterpillar' and the 'Pretty Butterfly') as well as more general songs; the group also performed action songs during which, for example, the children pretended to be 'as small as a mouse, as thin as a pin, and as wide as a gate' etc. After playing the game in which each child in turn was hidden under a blanket and the others had to guess who was 'missing' (the children learned to observe more closely as the game progressed and became better and better at guessing quickly) one of the teachers, in front of the group, went through homework books with four children individually, discussing what had been done and praising each child, before addressing remarks to the group as a whole. Judging by their smiles, the four children enjoyed displaying what they had done but seemed quiet and shy and did not respond a great deal verbally. The group time ended shortly after 11.30am with the giving out of completed paintings and other art work. The atmosphere throughout the session was busy, but also friendly and comfortable.

Final packing of the van was completed by 11.37am and, 20 minutes later, the teachers were back in Waimate. On this occasion, there was time for the teachers to eat a comparatively leisurely lunch (one returning to her home and the other, together with the researcher, eating lunch with teachers at the base kindergarten).

Parents

Fourteen parents remained throughout the session and one (a father) was present for the first 25 minutes. The teachers commented that there were fewer parents than usual and thought perhaps that this was due to a local function held the night before which had meant a very late night for many.

As well as most parents helping the teachers and the two parents on duty with 'housekeeping' tasks, all present interacted with the children throughout the morning. The father, for example, spent all of his time with his son and some other children working with puzzles. Other parents helped children (and the teachers) working on the theme activities; they also helped supervise inside and outside, carried out caregiving tasks (eg putting on and taking off aprons), enabled children to paint by putting paper on easels, read stories to their own and other children, and encouraged children working with Lego, blocks and other toys and equipment.

The group was friendly and relaxed and, as well as working closely with the children, participants appeared to enjoy very much the opportunity to meet and talk together. Several women also spent a few minutes exchanging patterns for children's clothing.

One of the women present, a trained kindergarten teacher, sometimes acted as reliever on the mobile pre-school unit if one or other of the usual teachers was absent. She remarked to the researcher that a particularly challenging aspect of the work was learning to cater for the wide age range amongst pre-schoolers who customarily attended a given mobile unit session. She said that as this was something she had not found easy to cope with herself she particularly admired the way in which the permanent teachers related so well to children of all ages and catered to their needs.

Two other parents also remarked to the researcher how fortunate their community was to have the services of the mobile pre-school unit and that it was a highlight of both their's and their children's week.

WAIHAORUNGA: THURSDAY AFTERNOON, 17 MARCH 1988

After lunch, the teachers left Waimate to drive to Waihaorunga, a drive of approximately 25 minutes (although on this occasion the trip took a little longer due to strong winds which made it dangerous to travel at normal speed).

The Waihaorunga venue

The Waihaorunga community, west of Waimate, is made up entirely of families who farm the land. Amongst the families which attended the Waihaorunga group at the time the fieldwork was carried out, most were farm owners while others worked on farms as managers or in other capacities.

Facilities Available to the Group

The Waihaorunga group rented an old, wooden house on a local farmer's property for their gatherings. The Waihaorunga group was a long-established one, which had been initiated by local parents about 20 years earlier, long before the Waimate mobile pre-school unit service began. As the house was used solely by the mobile unit group, equipment and furniture was able to be left permanently set up between sessions.

The house was located in an extremely attractive, secluded setting, reached from the road via a grass track. The well-fenced, outdoor play area was of generous proportions and mature trees of various species gave it added appeal. Local parents kept the grass in good order. Permanent outdoor equipment included a large sandpit enclosed by smooth, rounded logs (the sandpit was kept covered between sessions by means of a tarpaulin held down by tyres), swings, a metal climbing frame, and a variety of wooden cable reels. During the session, this equipment was supplemented by a portable see-saw (belonging to the group), ladders, the set of wooden steps from the van, hula-hoops, a trolley, and both crawl tunnels.

The house used by the group consisted of a long, wide hall and four main rooms. These included: the kitchen; a room used for dough play and activities such as Lego and, in the latter part of the session, for the large group activities; a room which the group had set aside as a 'family corner' (it contained, for example, a selection of dolls, a dolls' cot, a mirror, some small tables and chairs, a tea-set, a small electric oven, and telephones) and as a place to house their extensive collection of books (this had been built up over a long period by means of parent donations and children were able to borrow from the supply on a lending library basis); and a room devoted to whatever the 'theme' activities were for a particular week as well as to painting, cutting and pasting, and so on. In addition to these rooms there was a bathroom at the rear of the house, a small room off the main activity room devoted to carpentry, and an even smaller room used to store wood to fuel the two fireplaces, one of which was in the room used for dough play and the other in the family-cum-book-corner room. (Fires were lit regularly during winter months and sometimes at other times as well.)

Interior walls, ceilings, etc were painted either in pastel shades or white so, although the building was old, the effect was light and cheerful, made even more so by the generous number of colourful posters and examples of children's art work displayed throughout the house. While the floors were wooden, there were large mats or carpet squares in each room which covered most floor space. As well as tables and chairs used by the children, there were sofas for the parents' use.

The permanent book corner, Waihaorunga

The Session

When the teachers arrived, several parents and children were already at the venue. After unlocking the building, parents and children had climbed over the fence surrounding the property and were collecting pine cones for the fire which had been lit in one of the rooms.

The van could be driven close to the cottage which greatly facilitated the unpacking process. With help from the parents, the session was able to be set up very quickly.

Despite the strong, cold wind the sun was shining. The teachers therefore decided to supplement the outdoor activities referred to earlier by placing the portable book-stand from the van in a sheltered, sunny spot outside. Mats were spread out on the grass for the children - and parents - to sit on while looking at the books. Also put outside on this occasion was the wooden tray table containing the mixture of flour and lentils and a variety of containers and flour sifters. (This activity replaced water play which the teachers felt was unsuitable on account of the wind, especially for the younger children present who were almost inevitably attracted to the water tank when it was available.)

Inside, in the first of the main activity rooms, the teachers set up the dough table and placed containers of Lego, wooden construction equipment, and blocks on the floor. Puzzles were spread out on a low table and, nearby, on two old-fashioned wooden school desks pushed together, the caterpillar board game (played with counters and dice) was available. (There were also sturdy wooden trucks, wooden blocks, and some other equipment belonging to the group.) The fire which had been lit (made safe by a securely fitting fire-guard) made the children's work space in this area invitingly warm and cosy.

In the other main work room, materials for the week's theme activities (ie making a caterpillar and the fold-and-close butterfly activity) were set out, as were paints, brushes, and paper clipped to easels.

Collage work, Waihaorunga

As usual at sessions held by the Waimate mobile pre-school unit, one teacher remained outside for most of the session while the other teacher worked with children inside.

Thirteen children[5] attended the session, eight of whom were aged $2^1/_2$ years or more. The remaining children included a baby, two toddlers, and two children almost old enough to be enrolled. All of the enrolled children (plus two of the younger children) took part in both theme activities; they also painted, listened to stories read to them by their parents outside at the book-corner, did collage work, played with Lego and other small motor equipment, worked with puzzles and with the dough, played the caterpillar board game with a teacher and with one or two of the parents, and spent time in the sandpit, on the climbing apparatus, and at the flour table. Two or three children also made constructions in the carpentry room. (This group was well equipped with wood and tools and had a carpentry bench complete with vice which was left permanently set up in its own little room.) At one point during the session, the teacher on outside duty left the parents to supervise while she and a group of six children went inside to the room containing the group's 'library' for the story of the 'Hungry Caterpillar'. At the end of the story, the teacher took the opportunity to teach the children about 'sharing' and 'taking turns', inviting each child to choose from the felt board a picture which she had used to illustrate the story and put it away in a box. She then read a book about a 'squiggly wiggly worm' to the four children who remained.

As it was a relatively small group with a very favourable ratio of adults to children (in addition to the teachers there were eight parents and one woman's teenage sister present throughout the session), the teachers had ample opportunity to talk to each child in turn and to assist, as required, with the different activities the children chose to take part in. The teachers talked to the children about a variety of topics but also drew their attention to the session theme, encouraging them to talk about caterpillars, butterflies, and other 'bugs'. Two or three of the children were very shy and both teachers made a point of talking to those children. A teacher reported that one such child - a boy of about $3^1/_2$ years of age - had, in response to something she had said, spoken to her for the first time ever!

Shortly after 2.30pm, the parents cleared some work tables and set out the afternoon tea for both children and adults in front of the fire. All of the children sat together to drink their Milo and eat the crackers and cheese which had been provided. (This was one of only two of the eight groups visited by the mobile unit where the morning or afternoon break was regarded as a 'formal' occasion and all of the children sat together.) The adults also had their cup of tea or coffee at this time and it was a pleasant and relaxed social occasion for all participants, with plenty of conversation.

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[5] There were several absentees at this particular session: the teachers reported that, as at March 1988, there were 16 families enrolled at the Waihaorunga group with 14 children of $2^1/_2$ years or more and seven children under $2^1/_2$ years altogether, a potential attendance level of 21.

Group activities, for the eight children of enrolled age (the younger children stayed with their mothers in a separate room), were led by both teachers and commenced about 2.50pm with the game where each child in turn was hidden under a blanket, leaving the other children to guess who was 'missing'. The group then went on to sing along to tape-recorded music and to do action songs and finger plays. Finally, to close the session, three children talked with one of the teachers in front of the group about what they had done in their homework books since the last session. (The teacher had had a look at their books earlier in the session, stamped them with 'smiling faces', and written comments and ideas for further activities to do at home with their parents.) All three children seemed to enjoy very much the opportunity to display their books, talking enthusiastically with the teachers and smiling frequently. The session ended at 3.09pm with the teachers saying 'good-bye' to all children, including the toddlers who came in at this point to join the older children.

The atmosphere throughout the session was very relaxed and comfortable, with the children fully - and apparently very happily - occupied and the adults present not only participating freely in the pre-school programme but also able to interact amongst themselves.

Parents

The parents at this group were very friendly and keen to talk to the researcher about the study and about their particular group.

The president of the group's committee commented that the group was a very valuable part of their community. She described how, when things had been particularly bad in the district two years earlier due to serious floods and the general downturn in the farming community, being able to attend sessions each week and talk to others had helped her and other women cope. Three other parents present at the session agreed, and remarked that "we get as much benefit from the group as the children do". The parents also commented on how much they appreciated having trained, approachable teachers coming along to give sound advice and suggestions about their children. They said that two or three of the children who attended the group had problems of various sorts and, as parents, they appreciated the way that the teachers went out of their way to spend extra time with these children and to respond to parents' queries and concerns. (During the session, the teachers distributed a short newsletter they had put together after finding that parents often asked them for information about the differences, generally speaking, between two-, three-, and four-year-olds and about each group's learning needs.)

Another parent, new to the district, felt that bringing her child along to sessions had helped her and her family become part of the community much more quickly than would have been the case without the mobile unit.

The only disadvantage that one or two of the parents saw with the mobile unit was that it was not able to visit their group more frequently. (Two or three others, however, said that although, in theory, they would have liked more sessions, in practice they would be unlikely to be able to attend extra sessions on a regular basis due to distance to travel and other commitments.) One mother, however, stated that she got around the problem of what she felt was insufficient pre-school education for her almost-five-year-old by taking him into the kindergarten in Waimate on Monday and Friday mornings.

As well as chatting together, to the teachers, and to the researcher, the eight parents - and one child's aunt - also interacted frequently with the children, for example, when they were playing in the sandpit and when using the swings and other outdoor equipment. They also helped the 'inside' teacher with children who were making caterpillars and butterflies and undertaking other creative endeavours, read stories, hung children's completed paintings to dry on the line strung in the hallway, and played board games. The teachers stated that they always found parents at this group to be very conscientious about supervising the toddlers and other very young pre-schoolers which was a considerable help as it was easy for a child to 'get lost' in a venue with so many different rooms.

Although the parent questionnaires for the study were distributed during the session, the parents chose to take them home to complete, firstly, because they did not want to take time out from what was happening at the session and secondly, because they wanted to have time to consider their answers.

While the teachers were leading the group activities for the older children, the parents completed much of the tidying up process and carried equipment outside ready for the teachers to load into the van.

HUNTER: FRIDAY MORNING, 18 MARCH 1988

The last group to be visited by the Waimate pre-school unit each week was at Hunter, another predominantly farming community 16 kilometres north of Waimate. The teachers left their base at 8.35am, arriving at Hunter at 9am.

Facilities Available to the Group

The Hunter group met in the local community hall, an old wooden building, painted brown. Although the hall was situated immediately alongside a road, the outdoor area had been securely fenced all the way around, making it safe for pre-schoolers.

The hall used by the Hunter group

A wide gate in the fence allowed the teachers to drive the van right off the road and park it outside the kitchen entrance to the hall. (The main entrance to the hall, which opened directly onto the road was not used by the group.) This greatly facilitated the unloading of the van and the time taken to set up the session. The gate was kept firmly closed while the session was in progress.

The building consisted of a kitchen, supper room, the large main room or hall, toilets, and a small room used by the group to store equipment between sessions.

The hall - where most indoor activities were made available - had mustard coloured walls, tall windows curtained in a brown, orange, and cream material, and a wooden floor. As well, there was a high stage with a piano on it at one end of the room, reached by a short flight of steps. Because the building was not used solely by the mobile pre-school unit, it was not possible to decorate the hall with children's art work or with posters. Apart from the curtains, therefore, almost the only source of colour in the room was from three or four large, crayoned shapes of ice-cream sundaes pinned to the wall in one corner. (These had not originated from the mobile unit group.)

The hall was furnished with long, wooden benches around its perimeter, several adult-sized tables with accompanying chairs, some wall-mounted electric heaters, and a pot-belly stove surrounded by a metal and wire guard. (The stove, however, was so full of paper and rubbish that it could not be used on this occasion despite the very chilly temperature. This motivated one of the parents to empty all of the rubbish from the stove into large bags which she would take home to dispose of; the parent group intended to have the stove ready to light at the next session should it be necessary.) The large tables and chairs were supplemented during the session by some child-sized ones which the teachers brought out from the small storeroom behind the stage.

The supper room, a long narrow room adjacent to the kitchen and parallel to the main hall, was also used during sessions by the group. The walls of the supper room, like those in the hall, were again painted in a mustard colour and there were blue, white, and brown curtains at the windows. Although the floor was wooden, there was a carpet square covering most of the bare boards; the teachers also brought out a large rug from the storeroom which they

The supper room, Hunter

spread on the floor to make the children more comfortable. There were two doors, one at either end of the supper room, which gave access to the main hall.

The outdoor area available to the children to play in consisted of a quite narrow stretch of grass, extending the length of the building. Beyond the fence were trees and, down in a small valley, a river; it was a pretty outlook which also took in a view of distant mountains. The outdoor area, which was at the rear of the hall and reached by means of a door leading from the kitchen, contained a sandpit, swings, a metal and rope climbing frame, some cable reels, and a new piece of climbing equipment made out of discarded tyres. (Both parents and teachers - not to mention the children - were very pleased with this new piece of equipment. One of the teachers had learned of the idea from a course she had attended. Local fathers had constructed it according to the specifications the teacher had given them, finishing it only the day before this particular session. The base was a large tractor tyre onto which several other tyres had been securely bolted.) The permanent outdoor equipment was, at this session, supplemented by a trolley and wooden steps and ladders.

The new climbing apparatus, Hunter

The Session

By the time the teachers arrived at the venue one of the parents had unlocked the hall. She then helped the teachers carry in equipment from the van and set up the session. The portable book-corner, wooden trucks, engines and railway lines, and containers of Lego and wooden construction toys were placed in the supper room. All other activities were set out in the main hall. Dough plus rolling pins and cutters (with the play oven nearby) were placed on a low table as were collage materials, scissors, sellotape, and glue. Puzzles, and the two theme activities (making caterpillars and butterfly pictures) were, however, placed on the high tables with the consequence that many of the children had to be lifted onto the chairs before they could take part. (But, as the teachers made a point of inviting and encouraging all of the enrolled-age children to take part in the theme activities, the height of the tables was not so much of a deterrent as it might have been if these activities were purely 'free choice'.)

The session in progress in the main hall, Hunter

There was no water play today; instead, the flour mix activity was made available. Also available at this session was a toy cash register (on loan to the group from the mobile unit's central supply of equipment) and a collection of empty boxes and containers. These were set up in one corner of the hall so that the children could play at being shop-keepers. (Three or four children spent approximately 15 minutes playing this game during the session. The teachers remarked, though, that this and similar examples of dramatic play were more evident during the winter months when outdoor play was often out of the question.)

Other equipment - such as dolls, a tea-set, telephones, dressing up clothes, and wooden blocks - belonging to the group - was available also. One of the parents had brought a wooden rocker along to the session. She was donating it to the group as she felt it would be suitable for some of the younger children who regularly attended. (The rocker, in the shape of a horse, was one that the children could sit in - on a broad wooden seat - rather than on as with the more usual rocking horse.) The mother's prediction proved correct and several little children were observed to be happily occupied riding the horse.

Setting up the session took approximately 20 minutes, somewhat longer than usual. This appeared to be mainly because it was necessary for the teachers - with the help of a parent - to cut a large, new piece of black polythene into three so that there were enough pieces to place under tables where the children carried out 'messy activities'.

On arrival, the hall seemed very cold, dull, and gloomy. However, when the lights and electric heaters had been switched on, mats spread on the floor, and equipment placed on tables and nearby benches, the hall underwent a major transformation and, once the session was fully underway, seemed welcoming and even cosy.

Although cold, several children chose to play outside when they first arrived; a shower of rain at about 9.40am, however, meant that they had to come inside. Everybody remained inside until shortly before the final music and games session when one of the teachers took a group of children - including several of the more boisterous boys - for a 10 minute 'run' outside. (The rain had stopped by this time and the temperature warmed a little.)

Twenty-six children attended the session. Of this number, 18 were 'officially enrolled' while four were babies and four were aged between one year and two years and six months. Amongst the children were two sets of twins and a two-year-old with spina bifida.

Because of the number of children present, one teacher in particular, was kept very busy for more than an hour helping children complete their theme activities. (All 18 of the older, enrolled children took part in one or both of these activities, as did two or three of the younger children.) Three or four parents also assisted the teacher and the children with these activities. The other teacher, apart from brief spells supervising children outside (where a major attraction was the new climbing apparatus made out of tyres), spent most of the session moving between small groups of children who were working on activities other than those related to the session theme. She also talked about caterpillars, butterflies, and bugs in general with different children (drawing their attention to the theme board which had been propped against the wall), told the story of the 'Hungry Caterpillar' to a group of 12 children out in the supper room and then went on to read two more stories to a group which fluctuated in size from eight to 11 children.

Collage work at the Hunter venue

At around 10.10am, one of the teachers asked several children to help her clear some space on tables for morning tea. All children were then asked and/or helped to wash their hands in bowls of warm, soapy water which the two parents on duty brought out into the hall for the purpose.

All of the older children had their snack (today this was a glass of fruit juice and a plain biscuit) sitting round a table together. The teachers had a cup of tea and a biscuit at the same time and, together with two of the parents, supervised and chatted to the children. (On this occasion, the teachers requested all other parents (16) to have their morning tea out in the kitchen which the parents willingly agreed to do. The reason for the request was that the teachers had found that a large number of adults present when the children were having their morning tea tended to make the break last a lot longer than they felt it should, thus preventing the children from returning to activities. This had also been exacerbated on many occasions by the parents on duty bringing along several plates of home baking to share with the other adults; when the children saw this they wanted to have some too, resulting in them spending a lot of time eating. The teachers commented that they were pleased with the new arrangement and hoped to continue the practice as they felt that it made for a much more orderly session. They also felt that it gave the parents a chance to chat together while having their own tea or coffee without constant interruptions.)

Around 10.55am, while one of the teachers was outside with a group of children, the other teacher and several parents carried out some preliminary packing and tidying up, in readiness for the large group activity session. (Previously, parents had undertaken these duties while the group session was in progress but the teachers had found that the children were distracted by what the parents were doing and the noise that was made, hence the change in strategy.)

All but the six youngest children - who stayed in the kitchen with their mothers - took part in the large group activity. While the head teacher accompanied them on piano, the group did exercises, finger plays, and sang a number of songs. Also, as happened at all other sessions held by the unit during the observation period, the group played the game in which everybody moved around the room until the music stopped playing at which time the children had to close their eyes while someone was hidden under a blanket. By the time several children had been hidden, the group became very quick at guessing who was 'missing'.

Six children talked with a teacher in front of the group about the assignments they had completed in their homework books. These children, most of whom had only a few months to go before attending school, were very eager to talk about what they had done; one boy, in particular, did not seem to want to stop talking and had to be gently reminded that other children were waiting to have their turn! Finally, the group sang another song just before the session ended at 11.46am. (The teachers said good-bye to each child in turn and handed out completed paintings and other work which had been drying on the stage.)

Once the session had ended, the teachers took the opportunity to give paint brushes, trays, and containers a thorough washing in the kitchen. It was customary for the teachers to carry out this task at the Hunter venue because, they said, it was much easier to do it there than back at their base where they shared facilities with other teachers. After loading all equipment into the van and having a final word with the parents and children still present (several parents were chatting together while their children played around outside), the teachers left at about 12.10pm to return to Waimate for the afternoon administration and planning session.

Parents

A large number (15) of parents were present throughout the session while an additional three arrived about 10am and stayed for the remainder of the morning. (Four or five or the women were expecting babies in the weeks to come.)

Although most parents spent the majority of the session chatting together, five or six parents (including the two parents rostered for duty) interacted frequently with children who were making caterpillars and butterflies and with those who were painting and/or working with puzzles, dough, and Lego. Two or three parents were also observed to read stories to small groups of two, three, or four children.

The teachers commented that the parents at this group were always very conscientious about supervising their own toddlers; most also helped to facilitate the smooth running of the session by carrying out such tasks as sweeping the hall, cleaning table tops, preparing equipment for loading into the van, and helping children put on or take off aprons, tie shoelaces, and wash their hands.

Two members of the parent committee were interested in the study and talked to the researcher about it. During the discussion, these parents commented on how important they felt the mobile pre-school unit service was, both for themselves and for their children. It also occurred to them during the discussion how valuable it would be if they and committee members from other groups attended by the Waimate mobile pre-school unit were to exchange visits during session times in order to share ideas and experiences. They felt that this would help give a sense of overall unity amongst the eight groups and were intending to implement their idea as soon as practicable.

During the session, one of the parents spent five minutes or so talking to a teacher about the sorts of activities and equipment it would be appropriate for her to provide at home for her almost-four-year-old.

Outdoor facilities, Hunter venue

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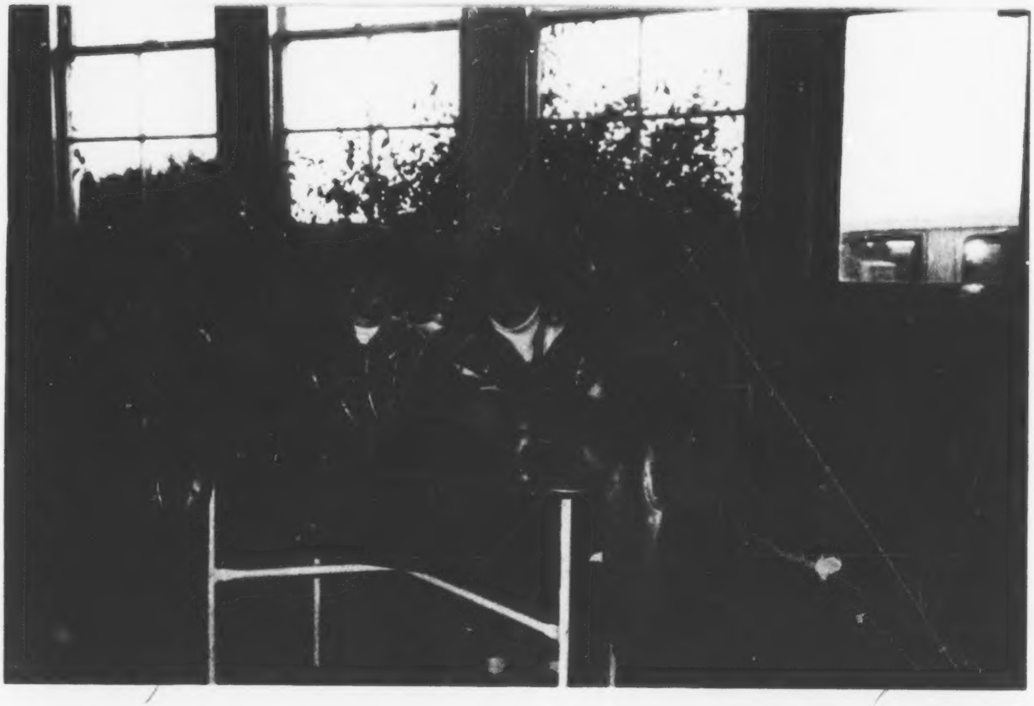
THE SOUTHLAND MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT, INVERCARGILL



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THE SOUTHLAND MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT, INVERCARGILL

Introduction[1]

The Southland mobile pre-school unit, under the control of the Southland Free Kindergarten Association, commenced operations on 29 January 1979. Initial investigations into the need to establish a unit in the Southland area had been carried out in 1978 by the then District Adviser on Pre-School Education (DAPSE) in consultation with the Southland Playcentre Association and the local kindergarten association. (The results of the investigation showed that there was a significant number of families who lived too far away from either a playcentre or a kindergarten to make it feasible to take their pre-schoolers to sessions on any regular basis, if at all.)

During the first week of their appointment, the mobile unit teachers spent their time discussing with the DAPSE the working of the unit and the purchase of equipment; they also met with representatives from each of the seven groups on the unit's initial itinerary. The second week was spent visiting each group, meeting the parents and explaining to them the role of the mobile pre-school unit, its objectives, and its relationship with the local kindergarten association, the DAPSE, and others. From 12 February 1979, the teachers began running sessions at the different groups, using a private car for transporting both themselves and their equipment. There had been a delay in the release of the former school bus fleet vehicle which had been promised to the mobile unit, but by late March 1979 the teachers had a 1967 Ford Transit van (with rear seats removed to allow for storage of equipment) at their disposal. For some weeks the teachers continued to build up their supply of equipment and by Term II, 1979, they were conducting eight sessions per week (providing on alternate weeks a second session for two of the seven groups visited). The groups served were in the communities of Limehills, Isla Bank, Dacre, Waianiwa, Waimatuku, Mataura Island, and Drummond.

The introduction of the Invercargill-based mobile pre-school unit attracted considerable public interest and on at least one occasion was the subject of an article in the Southland Times.

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[1] Information from Department of Education files.

Southland Mobile Pre-School Unit

In 1982, an evaluation of the Southland mobile pre-school unit was carried out[2]. The major purpose of the evaluation was stated to be 'to find out if the client groups were satisfied with the running of the unit', and 'to clarify the roles of parents and staff'. Evidence (derived from questionnaires filled out by teachers, parents, and kindergarten association staff) suggested that although parents - and teachers - generally felt very positively about the mobile unit and the service that it provided, there was a need for improved communication to ensure that members of each party (parents, teachers) were fully aware not only of their own role and duties but were also aware of the expectations that the other party held for them. (For example, data suggested that parents felt that the teachers should run the sessions, provide more 'professional leadership', and give more direction to the children whereas the teachers would have preferred parents to become more involved in the programme; on occasion, there were also some problems arising from too many parents remaining to socialise during sessions which, when the venue was small, made the teachers' work more difficult.) A note on file indicated that as a result of the study, it was felt that "the Southland Mobile Unit showed a need for the teachers to develop a more comprehensive approach to their parent work". An application was therefore lodged to the Department of Education for an increased mileage allowance to enable the then teachers to visit each group's parent committee on a regular basis to discuss aspects of the running and organisation of the mobile unit and to develop parent education sessions. In April 1983, the mobile unit teachers were given permission to travel an extra 600 kilometres per year for this purpose[3].

The Itinerary of the Southland Mobile Pre-School Unit

At the time the fieldwork was carried out (March 1988) the Southland mobile pre-school unit was visiting eight groups per week; the map overleaf shows the location of the groups. As shown in Table 9.1, the teachers spent almost six hours each week travelling in the course of their work, a total distance of around 444 kilometres.

Compared to most of the other mobile units, there have been very few changes in itinerary throughout the unit's history. The changes which have occurred have mainly resulted from a change of venue rather than the mobile unit serving a different community altogether. For example, from the outset, the mobile unit visited (amongst others) groups at Limehills, Isla Bank, and Dacre. Although it appeared that the mobile unit was no longer visiting these groups in 1988, this was not the case; that is,because a number of Southland primary schools

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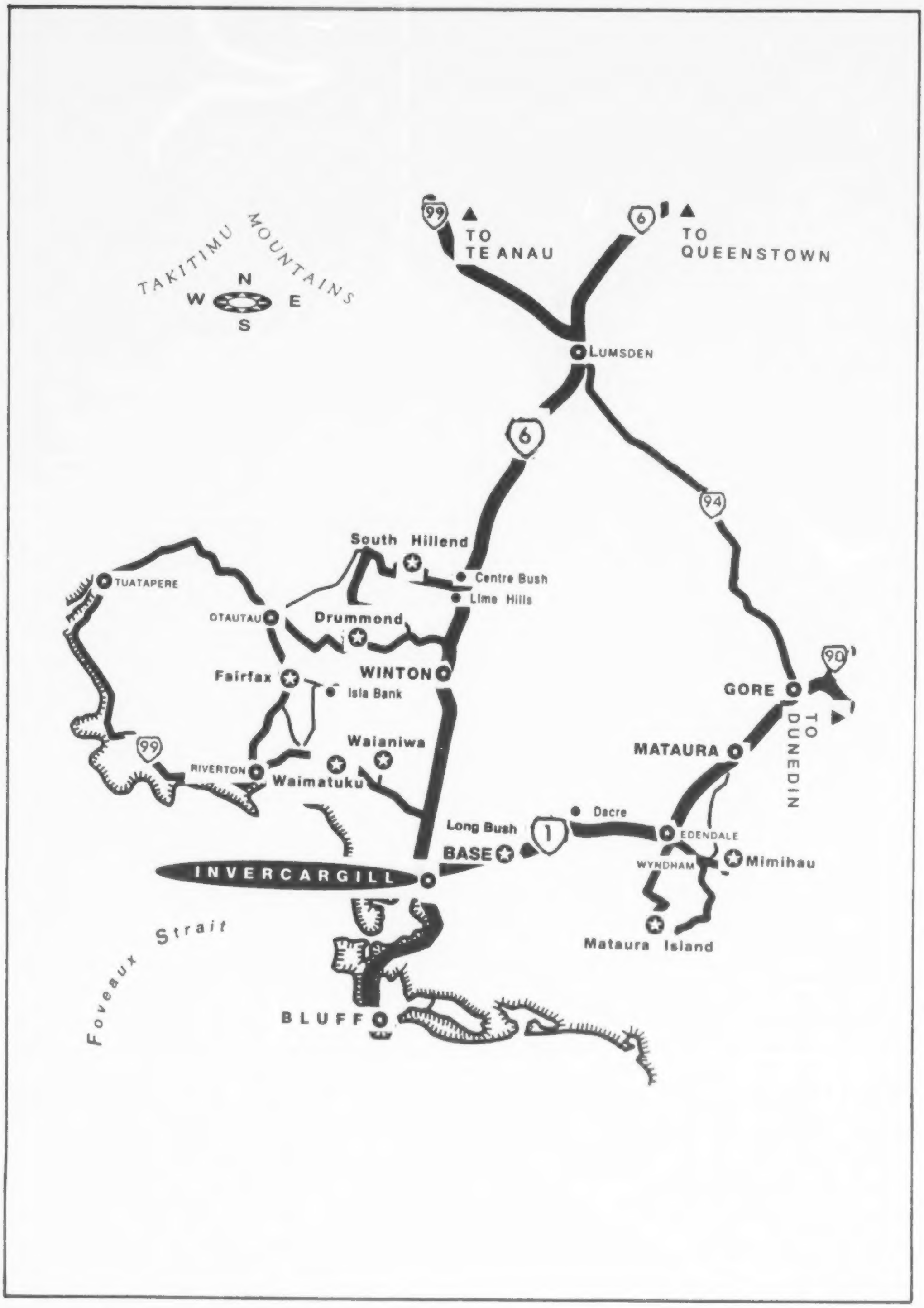
[2] Although there is a copy of the brief evaluation report on file, it does not record who was responsible for carrying out the evaluation. (It is likely that it was undertaken by the then District Adviser on Pre-School Education.)

[3] Due to lack of time, this practice no longer occurred on 'a regular basis' at the time the fieldwork was carried out in March 1988.

Southland Mobile Pre-School Unit


TAKITIMU MOUNTAINS
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South Hillend
Centre Bush
Lime Hills
TUATAPERE
OTAUTAU
Drummond
WINTON
Fairfax
Isla Bank
GORE
90
TO DUNEDIN
MATAURA
Waianiwa
99
RIVERTON
Waimatuku
Dacre
Long Bush
1
EDENDALE
BASE
INVERCARGILL
WYNDHAM
Mimihau
Mataura Island
Foveaux Strait
BLUFF

Scale 2cm = 5 kilometres

Table 9.1: Approximate distances travelled per week and the time spent travelling by the Southland mobile pre-school unit teachers

	Base to morning destination			Morning destination to afternoon destination			Afternoon destination to base		Total kilometres per day	Total travelling time per day (mins)
	Morning destination	Distance travelled (kilometres)	Travelling time* (mins)	Afternoon destination	Distance travelled (kilometres)	Travelling time (mins)	Distance travelled (kilometres)	Travelling time (mins)		
Monday	Mimihau	53	40	Mataura Island	26	20	46	35	125	95
Tuesday	Waimatuku	26	20	Fairfax	20	15	43	35	89	70
Wednesday	Waianiwa	28	25	Base at Longbush (Admin and planning)	34	25	16	15	78	65
Thursday	South Hillend	55	45	Drummond	22	15	43	35	120	95
Friday	Longbush (session)	16	15	Longbush (Admin and planning)	-	-	16	15	32	30
								Weekly totals	444 kilometres	355 minutes (5 hrs 55 mins)

* The head teacher commented : "The start and end of each journey involves travelling through the city which takes quite a bit of time before reaching open highway. All routes have excellent, sealed roads."

had either closed or become smaller due to falling rolls, some of the mobile unit's groups were able to move out of the community halls where they had begun into disused school classrooms. Thus, the Limehills group which once met in the Limehills Rugby Club Pavilion moved into the former South Hillend School and became known as the 'South Hillend group'. Similarly, Isla Bank became the Fairfax group, and Dacre became the Longbush group. The only other notable change in itinerary occurred in 1984 when the mobile unit commenced visits to a group based at the Mimihau School (the local school principal had seen a need in the community for the service provided by the mobile unit and had taken steps to see that a proposal to this effect was put forward to the kindergarten association and the Department of Education) and ceased providing a second session - on alternate weeks - for the Waimatuku and Waianiwa groups.

As noted later in this case study, at the time the fieldwork was carried out, the head teacher was hoping to institute a further, rare change in itinerary. She felt that better use of their (the mobile unit teachers') time and resources would be made if, instead of continuing to visit the group at Waimatuku where numbers were gradually declining, they were instead to run two sessions per week for their very large Longbush group. (In a small, informal survey they had found that "99% of parents from the Longbush group said they would bring their child to a second session if it was available".) Although they would be unhappy to close the Waimatuku group, the teachers nevertheless felt that all, or almost all, of the families there would be able to make alternative arrangements (eg by attending one of the other groups attached to the mobile unit or by taking their children to a kindergarten in a nearby town) without major problems.

Length of Sessions and Time Taken to Unpack and Repack Equipment Before and After Sessions

Two hours, not counting time needed to set up and pack equipment away again, were allocated to all sessions - both morning and afternoon - conducted by the Southland mobile unit (Table 9.2). Because children not infrequently arrived with their parents before a session was officially due to begin (ie during the 15 to 30 minute period allowed for unpacking the van and getting the session underway) actual session time for such children was often longer than the two hours; inevitably, the children began to use whatever equipment was available the moment they arrived and/or to interact with their peers or with the teachers. Table 9.3 shows how long, on average, it took to set up each session and to reload equipment into the van at the session's end.

Southland Mobile Pre-School Unit

Table 9.2: Length of sessions and times sessions began and ended during the fieldwork period at the Southland mobile pre-school unit

Name of group/time	Time session began	Time session ended	Length of session[a]
Mimihau (Monday am)	9.25am	11.32am	2hrs 7mins
Mataura Island (Monday pm)	12.55pm	2.55pm	2hrs
Waimatuku (Tuesday am)	9.20am	11.30am	2hrs 10mins
Fairfax (Tuesday pm)	1.00pm	3.05pm	2hrs 5mins
Waianiwa (Wednesday am)	9.25am	11.30am	2hrs 5mins
South Hillend (Thursday am)	9.25am	11.35am	2hrs 10mins
Drummond (Thursday pm)	1.00pm	3.03pm	2hrs 3mins
Longbush (Friday am)	9.20am	11.35am	2hrs 15mins

a Not including time taken to unpack and repack equipment before and after sessions.

Table 9.3: Time (in minutes) taken to unpack and pack up at each session

Name of group	Time taken to unpack and to set up session[a]	Time taken to pack up etc[b]
Mimihau	15	10
Mataura Island	10	5
Waimatuku	5	3
Fairfax	12	8
Waianiwa	8	5
South Hillend	8	5
Drummond	8	5
Longbush	15	10

a This was completed in the time allocated to the purpose before sessions officially began.

b Does not include time taken during the session : parents completed most of the necessary cleaning and tidying up and packing of equipment while the teachers were conducting the large group activities; these duties therefore did not interrupt the session.

The Communities Served by the Southland Mobile Pre-School Unit

Although the teachers did not have specific details about the backgrounds of many families associated with the Southland mobile pre-school unit, they described members of the communities that they served as predominantly pakeha, and involved either in farming or farming-related pursuits such as shearing or working in the freezing works industry. A few children's parents were teachers, while others were employed in shops or other businesses located in Invercargill or smaller towns nearby. Some others, too, combined working small holdings (which were more of a hobby than a major source of income) with an occupation in town. Although the teachers were aware that some families were "not very well off", they did not feel that unemployment was a notable problem at that stage.

The teachers stated that, in their view, there were no particular characteristics of the communities that they served which had a major influence on the way that they worked with the children or parents (except perhaps that they were constantly aware that many of the children with whom they worked often did not have a great deal of contact with others outside their immediate families and, as a consequence, they tended to be quieter and shyer than children with the opportunity to interact regularly with a wider range of people). The only events which could sometimes disrupt - in the sense of causing lower attendance at - sessions was when women had to help out at home with seasonal farming commitments (cooking for shearers, assisting with mustering, lambing, hay-making, etc) and could not bring their children to sessions. School events were reported to be less of a problem for the Southland mobile pre-school unit than for some of the other units because so many of their groups met for sessions within the local school grounds which meant that parents did not have to try and combine visits to the school with dropping off their pre-schoolers at a different location.

The Children

The official enrolment age for children at the Southland mobile pre-school unit was set at three years of age. Although younger children were welcome to come along to sessions with parents who were rostered for duty, in general, the teachers at this unit preferred that under-three-year-olds did not attend on a regular basis. This was partly because they (the teachers) liked to spend as much time as possible with the older children in the limited time they had available with groups each week and partly because at some (smaller) venues it was difficult to run the session when the number of children - and adults - attending became too great. As shown in Tables 9.4 and 9.5, large numbers of children (at least by mobile pre-

Southland Mobile Pre-School Unit

Table 9.4: Number of children present at each session held by the Southland mobile pre-school unit during the fieldwork period

Name of group/time	Number of enrolled children[a] present	Number of non-enrolled children present	Total number present
Mimihau (Monday am)	13	1	14
Mataura Island (Monday pm)	15	2	17
Waimatuku (Tuesday am)	7	3	10
Fairfax (Tuesday pm)	17	2	19
Waianiwa (Wednesday am)	19	1	20
South Hillend (Thursday am)	22	2	24
Drummond (Thursday pm)	20	1	21
Longbush (Friday am)	25	1	26

[a] Children aged 3 to 5 years.

Table 9.5: Number of children (as reported by teachers) present at sessions held 28-31 March and on 8 April, 1988

Name of group/time	Number of enrolled children present	Number of non-enrolled children present	Total number present
Mimihau	15	2	17
Mataura Island	18	6	24
Waimatuku	6	1	7
Fairfax	21	6	27
Waianiwa	19	1	20
South Hillend	19	1	20
Drummond	20	2	22
Longbush	26	5	31

school unit standards) aged three to five years attended most groups served by the Southland mobile pre-school unit.

The mobile unit operated a waiting list: parents could put their children's name down on this list as soon as they turned two years of age. Families who asked to have their child's name added to the waiting list were usually those which did not already have an older child attending the mobile unit. Other parents tended just to bring their under-threes (including babies and very young toddlers) along with them - together with their older pre-schoolers - when they were rostered for duty or on occasions when they simply felt like staying at the session - then, when they turned three years, these children simply continued to come along to sessions as a matter of course. At the time the fieldwork was carried out, the 'official' waiting list varied between approximately seven (Waimatuku) and 20 (Longbush) children. The teachers tried to ensure that when new children were due to begin attending sessions that they only had one such child at a time: they felt that it was particularly important to spend as much time as possible with a new entrant on his or her first day as it would be a whole week before they came again.

The teachers were aware that some of the mobile unit children also attended other pre-school education centres (eg playcentres or kindergartens in Invercargill or towns such as Riverton) from time to time. They did not mind this happening on an irregular basis (if done too often they felt that children could become confused at the contrasting approaches taken in different centres) as a way of broadening children's experience. Like many of the parents, they felt that the opportunity to attend only one pre-school session per week disadvantaged country children - especially those nearing school-age - compared to their counterparts in towns and cities.

The Parents Associated with the Southland Mobile Pre-School Unit

In general, apart from the two who were rostered for duty at each session, parents did not tend to remain throughout sessions held by the Southland mobile unit unless there was a special reason such as a scheduled visit by a public health nurse or a speech therapist, or a meeting. (At some groups, however, although they were not present at the session itself, parents remained at the venue in a room separate from the children in order to talk together; such parents regarded session times as an important social occasion for themselves.) Table 9.6 shows the number of parents at sessions during the fieldwork period and in the following week.

Table 9.6: Number of parents present at sessions held by the Southland mobile pre-school unit during the fieldwork period and in the following week

Name of group	Number of parents present for all or most of sessions held during the fieldwork period	Number of parents (as reported by the teachers) present in the week following the fieldwork period
Mimihau	4	6[a]
Mataura Island	7	14[b]
Waimatuku	5	4
Fairfax	4	8[c]
Waianiwa	3	2
South Hillend	4[d]	2
Drummond	3	4
Longbush	5	5

a A parent committee meeting was in progress on this occasion.
b Most of these parents, while remaining at the venue throughout the session, gathered in a room separate from the children in order to chat together.
c More parents than usual attended in order to speak with the visiting speech therapist.
d A further six parents spent their time in the 'staffroom' chatting together.

Although the teachers felt that, first and foremost, their responsibility was to the children who attended sessions, they tried always to be available to parents who wished to talk to them about their children or other matters. Apart from talking with parents before, during, and after sessions and at meetings, the teachers commented that they also had lunch with parents from time to time or spoke to them on the telephone during their Wednesday and Friday afternoon administration times. Their role with parents was, they felt, a multi-levelled one - a combination of friend, confidante, and adviser. The teachers also felt that parents saw them as professionals who were - and should be - responsible for 'taking charge' of the groups.

The Role of Parents

In an information sheet distributed to all new parents, the role of parent-helpers (and others who chose to remain) at sessions was outlined as follows:

> **". help unload the van**
> **. help teachers arrange necessary tables, equipment and materials**

- **. organise heating**
- **. organise morning/afternoon tea**
- **. help and guide children to do things for themselves, remembering not to actually do the thing for the child**
- **. listen, and try to be positive in all the children try to do**
- **. pack activities etc back into the van**
- **. arrange cleaning and tidying of venue, including bathroom and toilets**
- **. lock up."**

Some additional tips for parents who wished to work with the children during sessions (and at home) were also provided. These included the suggestions that parents "tune into the children's thinking, by listening and watching what they do", help children to create things in their own way rather than doing things for the children, and encourage children to help when tidying up.

Outside of sessions, parents contributed to decisions about the mobile unit via committee meetings, organised working-bees to cut grass and carry out general cleaning duties at venues, carried out fundraising activities to raise money to buy books and other materials for their own group's use, and, in some cases, to pay rent for the building their group met in.

Facilities Available to the Southland Mobile Pre-School Unit

The Southland mobile pre-school unit was in the fortunate position of having several unused classrooms or even entire former primary schools in which to conduct sessions. Having sole use of most of these venues meant that groups were able to leave equipment permanently set up, to display children's art work on the walls, and to spread themselves out while working on the various activities organised for a particular session.

Only one venue was reported to cause any difficulties of note: this was the venue where the mobile unit was required to share the junior classroom at the local school. As a result, there was little room to spare and none of the pre-schoolers work' could be displayed. (Trying to protect the carpet during messy play activities was always a constant worry for the teachers as well.) Other more minor disadvantages of the facilities at their disposal, according to the teachers, was that at some venues it was necessary to carry equipment some distance because the van could not be driven right up to the door, while other venues were cold until the heating had had a chance to take effect. One further disadvantage cited was that the outdoor facilities available to some groups were not entirely suitable for pre-schoolers. (However, as there was seldom any outdoor play during sessions held by this mobile unit, this was not of major concern.) The facilities available to each group are described in some detail in the section beginning on page 533.

The Mobile Unit's Base Location

Initially, the Southland mobile pre-school unit had been based at the Clarendon Kindergarten in Invercargill. The teachers had had their office there and, eventually, a small prefabricated shed in which to store equipment. When the Longbush primary school closed in 1986 due to falling rolls, however, this became available not only as a place to meet for the group in the Dacre area but also as a possible base for the mobile unit itself. Although the Longbush venue is approximately 15 minutes drive from down-town Invercargill, it offered ample storage space and an already-established office; the decision was therefore made in 1987 to shift the mobile unit's base location to the former Longbush School. (The accommodation available there is described more fully on page 588 following.) The teachers found their base very much to their liking and appreciated not having to be restricted in the way that they stored equipment and materials. (The only disadvantage was that they no longer had ready contact with the teachers at the 'town' kindergarten.)

The Van

It was not feasible to store the mobile unit's late model Ford Econovan at their base at the Longbush School; the head teacher had therefore arranged to have it garaged at a service station not far from her own home. The mechanic there was also responsible for carrying out regular checks on the vehicle and for completing necessary repairs.

The Programme Run by the Southland Mobile Pre-School Unit Teachers

The Southland mobile pre-school unit teachers described the aims of the programme that they ran as follows:

> **"The programme is planned to provide a stimulating and happy environment for children to learn through 'free play' and to provide new experiences for preparation for life. Children are given maximum opportunity to explore and experiment with a wide range of equipment and activities to promote initiative, and social interaction with peers and adults. Self-expression and growth are encouraged through art, music, movement, drama, and language. Through free play, the child develops physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially."[4]**

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[4] From an information sheet provided for parents.

In order to achieve their aims, the teachers had developed a programme which was a combination of free play and large group activities. As well as providing a range of activities and equipment (such as dough play, water play, puzzles, books, Lego, and so on) at each session, the teachers also developed a weekly theme which they carried through with all eight groups on their itinerary, only modifying aspects of it according to the age range of the children present at each group. (They noted that younger children need more encouragement to try new activities and more help to complete tasks than older children.) The teachers were constantly aware of how little time they had to spend with each of their groups and tried to fit in as much as possible in the two hours available for each session. They found that having a theme helped give focus and direction to their sessions and, as well as ensuring that children had a chance to complete one or two specified activities (which was often appreciated by parents as much as, if not more than, by the children), it provided a framework for conversing with the children.

The teachers made a point of talking to all children attending sessions, especially those who were shy or having language difficulties. (As stated earlier, the teachers were aware that many children had little contact with others outside their immediate families during the course of most weeks and, for this reason, they felt it even more important to help these children broaden their language experience as well as to develop confidence in interacting with others. The teachers commented that they frequently felt that there were children who would benefit from attending a speech therapist; when necessary, they brought the subject up with the children's parents and/or invited a speech therapist along to talk to parents during session times.)

Social interaction with peers was encouraged by having children at each group take their morning or afternoon tea-breaks together as a group, while large group activities (see, for example, the descriptions later in this case study of each session held during the fieldwork period) were designed so that children learned to cooperate and share, to have fun as a group, and to develop confidence in their ability to participate in music and games.

In order to provide for the needs of children nearing school-age (catering for the needs and abilities of a mixed age range of pre-schoolers was reported to be a constant challenge) the head teacher provided children aged from $4^1/_2$ to 5 years with 'homework books'. In these, she assigned tasks[5] for the children to do at home (either by themselves or with a parent) between sessions; she then went through work done in these books with each child individually when they returned to the group next time. Tasks assigned included, for example, having the children draw pictures of themselves, their family, home, pets, and friends, learn a new colour every week, collect information on major festivals such as Christmas and Easter, draw and 'write' a story about the mobile unit (teachers, van, etc), and complete worksheets focusing on concepts such as 'the same or different', numbers, and so on. The teacher stated that an added benefit of the homework books was that it "makes us give time to that child at sessions to talk over the book and their work".

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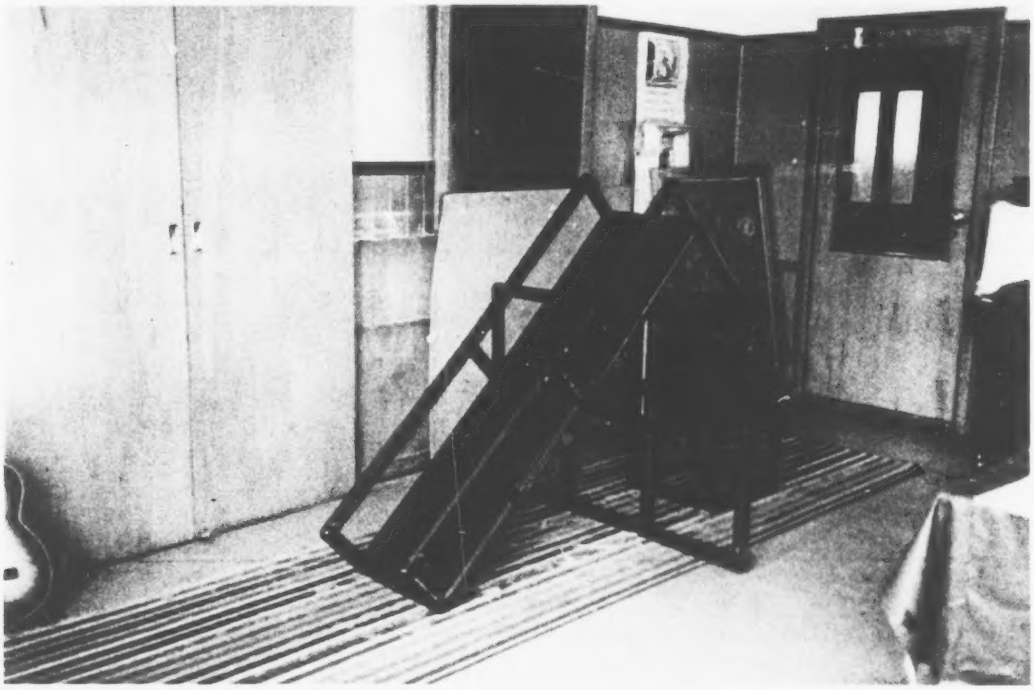
[5] The teacher was frequently required to do considerable preparation work in her own time in order to keep up with the demand from the children.

Despite sometimes feeling "a bit mean" if children asked to go outside (although, they reported, this seldom happened because the children were generally only too eager to work and play inside), their philosophy was that, because these country children spent most of their time outside the rest of the week, it was more important in the short time available to them at pre-school to concentrate on the activities set out for them inside. (Large motor skills were catered for to some extent by a large piece of equipment - which could be put together in various ways - designed to promote children's climbing and balancing skills.)

As a further way of giving the children who attended the mobile unit as broad a range of experience as possible, the teachers - and parents - organised regular trips for each of their groups. (The teachers noted that although no parent groups ran their own sessions on the days that the mobile unit did not visit - some past attempts had not lasted - parents put a lot of effort into planning successful and enjoyable trips.) Trips and other events which had been undertaken by the mobile unit either in the latter half of 1987 or early in 1988 included Pet Days, Teddy Bears' Picnics, excursions to the river, Christmas parties to which Santa Claus was invited, trips to schools and to an 'Awareness Centre' in Invercargill (which aimed to promote physical skill development, coordination, balance, etc), a visit to a poultry farm, Hat Days (when everybody wore a hat), and 'Wacky Wednesdays' (ie dressing up days).

Equipment Used by the Mobile Pre-School Unit

The Southland mobile pre-school unit teachers had a comprehensive stock of good quality equipment at their disposal. The unit owned, for example, an extensive supply of Duplo and Lego, much of which had been recently purchased. (Because they often had to cater for children younger than those who normally attend 'conventional' kindergartens, the teachers had bought Duplo - which has larger, chunkier pieces more suitable for children under three years of age - as well as Lego.) The mobile unit also owned a 'quadro' (another recent acquisition). This was a large but portable - it was 'collapsible', thus enabling it to fit into the van - piece of climbing equipment which could be bolted together in different ways. During the fieldwork period it had been made into a slide with an accompanying ladder and one or two climbing platforms. Although expensive, the teachers were finding this item of equipment to be invaluable: because of its design, it was able to be used indoors as well as outside, which meant that, even when outdoor play was not possible due to the weather or other reasons the children always had the opportunity to undertake a large motor activity during session time. (The teachers were also investigating the possibility of purchasing an 'activity gym' which again was suitable for either indoor or outdoor use.)



The Southland mobile pre-school unit's 'quadro'

The teachers commented that although they tended to restrict the number and range of activities and equipment available at sessions (they perhaps allowed children less of a choice at any one time than was the case at some of the other mobile units) so as always to have something 'different' or 'exciting' in reserve, they liked to change what was available on a regular basis (eg in the week prior to the fieldwork period one group used a variety of musical instruments and were able to participate in an activity involving a mixture of flour and lentils; these particular pursuits were not available during the observation period). As well as a desire simply to maintain children's interest in what was available at sessions, the teachers also varied the range of equipment and activities according, for instance, to the changing seasons, particular themes that they had planned, or the age of the children.

Some Aspects of Working on a Mobile Pre-School Unit

During their interviews and at other times during the fieldwork period, the teachers offered some insights into some of the difficulties of working on a mobile pre-school unit. One of those mentioned was the feeling of being, at times, "professionally isolated" with no one to talk to who fully understood the specific nature of a mobile pre-school unit with all its inherent strengths and weaknesses. Another difficulty was that of constantly having to 'educate' new parents - at eight different groups - about the concept of free play, and the general rules and procedures under which the mobile unit operated. Finally, although they felt that, compared with teachers in standard kindergartens, they had less work to do overall in developing themes for sessions (ie because they were able to use basically the same theme with all eight groups over the course of a week instead of having to develop new themes every, or nearly every day) they nevertheless were always aware that they had to "try and be at their best" for each new group. This was an aspect of the work which they frequently found to be both demanding and exhausting.

Teachers' Comments on what a 'Typical' Day or Week was Like for Them on the Southland Mobile Pre-School Unit

Teacher 1

"We are always busy. It's hard to describe in a nutshell everything we do, but, really, it's being on the run from the start of the week to the end. We try and see every child attending sessions on the day, and try and get around all the different groups [ie small groups of children working on different activities]. I sometimes wonder if we try to do too much when we only have two hours with each group, unlike town kindergartens where there is much more time. But we do try to do all the activities a 'normal' kindergarten would do. I like seeing the different children every day and they're always so keen to see you - mobile children just burst to tell you their news. The work is never boring or dull; you never watch the clock and wait for when it is time to go home."

Teacher 2

"In a word, 'busy' - busy but fun!"

A DESCRIPTION OF EACH VENUE VISITED AND SESSIONS HELD BY THE SOUTHLAND MOBILE PRE-SCHOOL UNIT DURING THE FIELDWORK PERIOD

During the fieldwork period (21 March 1988 to 25 March 1988), the theme for all sessions at the Southland mobile pre-school unit was 'Easter'. The theme-related activities which were emphasised at particular sessions, however, depended on the day each group met: the group which met on Fridays, and which was therefore going to miss a session in the week following the fieldwork period because of the Easter holiday, was doing different Easter activities from the groups which met earlier in the week. This was to ensure that this group was able to do the second stage of the pre-planned Easter activities before the Easter break.

The first phase of the Easter activities involved making 'Easter bunny' finger puppets (prior to the session the teachers had drawn the 'bunny' shapes onto stiff paper; the children were then helped to cut the shape out, draw a face on their rabbit, and stick on pieces of fur fabric) and using oval-shaped sponges, dipped into a variety of brightly-coloured paints, to make Easter egg 'paintings'. (The teachers had planned to have the children make hats but, because the children would have required help with this as well as with the finger puppet project, they realised that they would not have time for both activities within a single session. They therefore substituted the simpler sponge painting activity.) The 'second-phase' activities involved painting and decorating a hard boiled egg (a notice had been sent home with each child the previous week asking parents to supply the necessary egg) and making a basket in which to carry it. (The parent committee for each group was also asked to purchase chocolate Easter eggs - one for each child at their particular group. These eggs were to be added secretly to the decorated hard-boiled egg already in the children's baskets, as a special surprise for them when they collected their belongings at the end of the session.) In general, all children were invited to take part in these special activities. As a result, almost all children who attended sessions throughout the observation week completed one or both of the relevant theme projects as well as taking part in a variety of other activities.

MIMIHAU : MONDAY MORNING, 21 MARCH 1988

The first venue visited each week by the Southland mobile pre-school unit was at Mimihau School, approximately 35 minutes drive east, via Edendale, from Invercargill.

Facilities Available to the Group

The Mimihau School, formerly a two-teacher primary school, had officially closed at the end of 1987 because of falling rolls. (Prior to the school being closed, the mobile pre-school group had met in the school hall, located in the school grounds.)

Since the school's closure, the mobile pre-school group had had almost exclusive use of the facilities. The only other group to use the school, also on a part-time basis, was the polytechnic which ran evening classes there on machine knitting and embroidery.

MIMIHAU
SCHOOL

The Mimihau group's venue

As well as the hall, the red-brick school buildings included two classrooms, a kitchen/staffroom area, and, along a hallway, a small room which was originally used as the school's library. The school was very pleasantly situated in well-fenced grounds containing established trees and plenty of grass to play on.

Most of the time, the mobile group used just one of the two classrooms, but also used the small 'library' for mat-times and singing.

The Mimihau group's parent committee was responsible for maintaining the grounds (cutting the grass etc) and for carrying out any necessary cleaning inside. The committee was also responsible for organising fundraising events so as to ensure that the rental of $89 per term could be paid. (At the time the fieldwork was carried out, this rental was the cause of debate: when the school was open, the group had not had to pay any rent at all but, since the school had ceased to operate, the $89 a term fee had been imposed. Both parents and teachers felt that this was unreasonable, especially when the fee was set at such a level.)

The classroom used by the group had large windows along both the front and back walls which meant that the room was sunny and bright. The overall impression of light was further added to by the upper walls and ceiling being painted white; the lower walls consisted of wooden panels stained a light golden colour. A pot-belly stove (safely screened off) in one corner of the room could be lit in cold weather if necessary. There were blackboards (not low enough for the pre-school children's use) along one wall and, beneath them, shelves where the children placed their bags and coats on arrival. There were also shelves and cupboards along two other walls, plus a sink-bench in one corner. The floor was covered in a pale-coloured linoleum but several large mats scattered about allowed children to play comfortably at floor level.

One of many positive aspects for the mobile group of having almost sole use of such facilities was that the teachers were able to display children's work and posters on the walls. There were also a few examples left of work done by school children which further contributed to the colourful display.

There was a certain amount of furniture which was able to be left in the classroom between sessions. This included several child-sized tables and chairs. The tables, which provided the working surfaces for children looking at books, and doing puzzles, dough play, and collage work, were pulled out from the walls and placed in strategic positions at the beginning of each session. (An additional table from the van, covered in red hessian, was used to put clay on.) Other equipment stored at the school rather than being transported in the van included a 'Wendy House' (kept in the second classroom), a portable sandpit which was put just outside the door when the weather was suitable, painting easels, and, stored in cupboards, materials such as sellotape, glue, extra paper, and items which could be used for collage work.

The Session

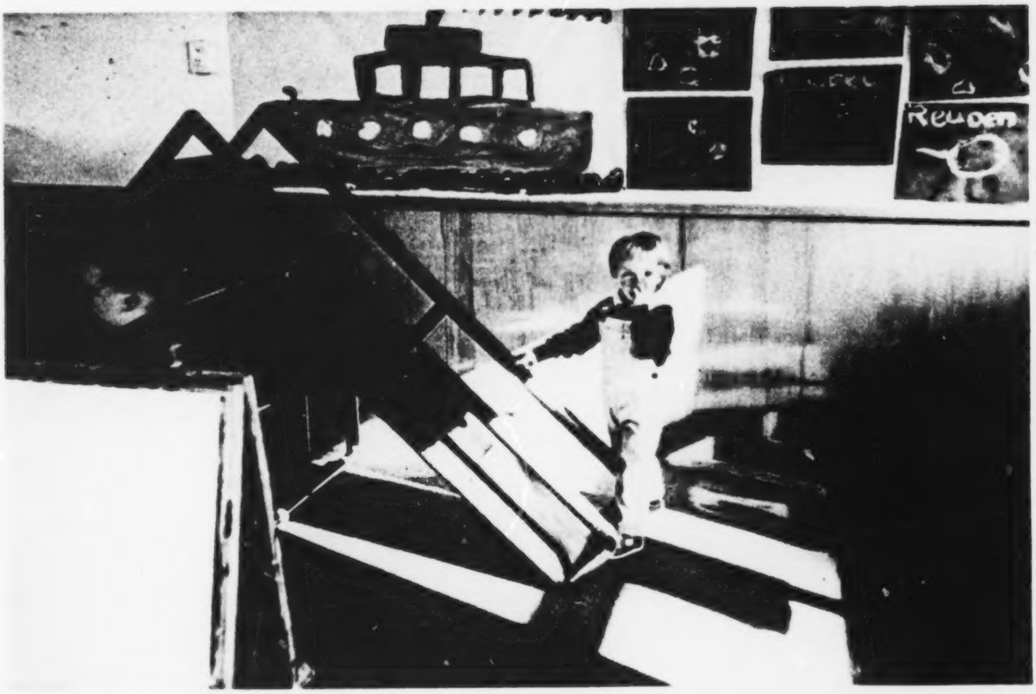
The teachers arrived at the venue at 9.10am; one of the two parents on duty arrived at almost the same moment. As the session was not due to begin until 9.30am there was ample time to unpack the van and set up equipment.

Time taken to unpack and set up took about 15 minutes: the process included moving several large, adult-sized tables out of the classroom and stacking them in the corridor leading to the 'library'. (The tables had been used since the previous session by students attending the polytechnic evening classes.) Both parents rostered for duty helped the teachers move and stack the tables.

Southland Mobile Pre-School Unit

The session in progress, Mimihau

More of the session in progress, Mimihau



Children attending the session had been taught to place their belongings (coat, bag, etc) in a compartment with their name on it as soon as they arrived. All of the children seemed to do this quite as a matter of course, and without putting their belongings in the wrong place.

Fourteen children were present at today's session, all but one of whom was of enrolled age, ie three years or more. The exception was a toddler who had accompanied one of the two parent-helpers. (As at March 1988, there were a total of 16 children on the Mimihau group's roll and nine children on the waiting list.) One of the children present - a three-and-a-half-year old - was mentally and physically handicapped. She was a regular attender at the Mimihau group and was always accompanied by her therapist who worked exclusively with her throughout the session.

Like all sessions run by the Southland mobile pre-school unit at the time the fieldwork was carried out, the morning was a mix of free-play activities and large group work. Until the mid-morning mat-time, therefore, the children were free to choose any of the activities which were available, working either in small groups (with or without a teacher), alone, or on a one-to-one basis with a teacher. The activities available at the session included the theme activities of making Easter bunny finger puppets and completing multi-coloured sponge paintings in the shape of eggs. As well, the children could work in the portable sandpit (using the spades, metal vehicles, buckets etc which had been brought along for the purpose), undertake dough play or carpentry, model with clay, look at books and/or listen to stories read by teachers or parents, complete puzzles, build with the extensive range of Lego and Duplo supplied by the mobile unit, play at the water tank, and/or use the quadro (climbing apparatus), today made into a slide and kept indoors.

Prior to mat-time, both teachers moved around the room, working with small groups or with individual children as they felt was appropriate. One teacher, for example, as well as spending time with children (2) doing puzzles, making finger puppets (12 children), and undertaking carpentry (4), spent five or so minutes with each of two of the older children, going through what they had done in their homework books and giving out stickers and silver and gold stars for good work. These children seemed eager to converse with the teacher about their books. (One or two other children sat nearby and observed while these interactions were taking place.) The teacher then had a short conversation with a child who was modelling with clay and another, longer conversation with a children working with Lego. She also asked a different child if he wanted to build something with Lego, suggested that a temporarily unoccupied child do a painting, comforted a child who had fallen over and carried out 'caregiving' tasks (tying shoelaces, rolling up sleeves, putting on aprons, and helping children to wash their hands for morning tea). Shortly after 10am, two children came and asked if they could play at the water tank. As this had not yet been filled, the teacher assisted the children to fill containers with water from an outside tap and empty them into the tank which was placed just inside the classroom door.

The other teacher was variously observed to chat to a boy working with clay, to two boys at the puzzle table, and to a boy and girl who were dipping sponges into paint to make Easter egg designs. She also admired the work completed by several children, giving plenty of verbal praise as well as smiling at and occasionally hugging a child (both teachers made a point of sending children over to the other teacher so she too could admire what the child had been working on), supervised and chatted to three or four children using the slide, and sat alongside small groups undertaking carpentry or experimenting with filling and emptying different-sized containers at the water tank. As well, she helped the other teacher (and two or three of the parents) with children who were making finger puppets, chatted to parents and to the therapist (including answering queries from one or two parents on how best to work with the children), and carried out caregiving tasks (rolling up sleeves, pinning paper to easels, hanging up completed paintings to dry, taking a child to the toilet, and putting on or taking off aprons). Finally, she spent several minutes with a child known to be very shy. She spoke a lot to this child who, although she did not respond verbally, frequently nodded at what the teacher said to her and even smiled once or twice.

The two parents on duty began preparations for morning tea about 10.45am. Preparing for morning tea meant packing up some of the equipment (dough, puzzles, etc) in order to free the tables for children to sit at while having their snack (or 'lunch', as the children called it). After making sure that the tables were clean, the parents and one teacher pushed them together. While this was going on, the children gathered together on a mat at the front of the room ready for mat-time. From 10.46am the head teacher led a group discussion (on a variety of topics), encouraging participation from children throughout. She also informed the children who the researcher was and explained why she was there. General discussion was followed by a story (about 'Georgie Grub') being read to the entire group. This lasted until 10.55am when the children were asked to wash their hands and collect their bags for morning tea. The child with special needs (accompanied by her therapist) remained throughout mat-time but seemed in some distress because she cried throughout the story (and later during the music and games session as well). The other children did not seem to be disturbed by this, however, and gave every appearance of listening attentively to the teacher while she read.

After being asked to wash their hands and collect their bags from their 'lockers', the children all sat together at the tables to have the food and drink that they had brought with them from home. While the children were thus engaged, the teachers supervised, chatted to different children, and helped with drinks bottles and other containers. They also chatted to parents - and the therapist referred to earlier - and had their own morning tea. (The parents on duty had supplied delicious home-made baking for the adults to eat.) Morning tea-time lasted until approximately 11.07, about 10 minutes in all. Immediately after morning tea, the entire group went along to the former school 'library' for games and music.

All children took part in the large group activity (although for the special needs child 'taking part' meant being present with her therapist rather than physically joining in). The group began by singing several songs, accompanied by the head teacher playing guitar. The teacher played the guitar well and, as both teachers had good voices, singing time, as well as being fun, was musical, undoubtedly making it more enjoyable for all taking part, not to mention those listening! The children certainly seemed to enjoy themselves, singing loudly, clapping, and smiling and laughing often, especially when accompanying words with action (eg when being flying saucers, mice, scarecrows, etc). The group then played the game which had been a feature of sessions held by the Waimate mobile pre-school unit during the fieldwork period - ie when the music stopped playing, everybody had to stand still and close their eyes while someone was hidden under a blanket. The group then had to guess who was 'missing'.

Following the game, while one teacher helped and encouraged the children, the other teacher played guitar and narrated a story about going for a bike ride. As she told the story, the children moved about the room, acting out the story - eg they pretended to ride bicycles, to picnic at the beach, and to ride home again, tired out after an enjoyable outing. The teachers then told the group that they would need to bring along a hard-boiled egg to next week's session because they were going to decorate them for Easter. The large group session ended at 11.32am with the head teacher instructing the children to collect their belongings and to choose a library book if they wished. (Each group visited by the Southland mobile pre-school unit had its own supply of books - bought with the proceeds of fundraising activities - which they allowed families to borrow on a 'lending library' basis. All groups had a board with envelopes or pockets attached. The pockets were used to file, under each child's name, cards from the books which had been borrowed. The cards recorded details of who had borrowed the book and when.)

Although some of the children - especially the younger ones - seemed rather quiet and shy, others chatted freely and all participated fully in available activities. The children seemed to enjoy interacting both with their peers and with the teachers (eg they were always eager to display their work to the teachers and to receive praise). One of the children brought along a lovely gladioli flower for each of the teachers.

By the time the teachers had finished packing the van, chatting to parents who had come to collect their children, and handing out the notices which asked parents to be sure and send their child along with a hard-boiled egg to paint at the next session, it was almost 11.50am.

The teachers - and the researcher - stayed at the Mimihau venue to eat their cut lunch before leaving about 12.25pm to drive to the Mataura Island venue.

Parents

Four parents, two of whom were rostered for duty, remained throughout the session. (Several parents associated with this group operated a car-pool system which meant that it was not necessary for all parents to attend sessions each week.)

As all four parents interacted with the children at least some of the time during the morning, this meant that there was a very favourable ratio of adults to children, allowing for plenty of verbal interaction. Parents also chatted to one another and to the teachers, and spent time simply observing.

The two parents rostered for duty helped the teachers unpack the van and set up the session. They also made tea (and supplied baking) for all adults present, cleared and cleaned table tops ready for the children's morning tea break and, while the teachers were conducting the large group activities, washed the classroom floor, tidied up, and prepared most equipment ready for packing into the van.

Comments from the Teacher Diaries[6]

Best/worst things about the session:

> ***"The worst was that we were late getting started as the building was not opened and a mother had to go and get a key. The session seemed short with the later start and there was not a lot of time to spare for talking individually with children. The best thing was that all children enjoyed the activities. (Two small children were quite busy and messy; they had a lovely time nevertheless!)"***

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[6] Comments from the 'Teacher Diaries' quoted on this and subsequent pages, except for those relating to the Friday morning session at Longbush which were made on 8 April (the week after Easter), are those made by the teachers in the week following the fieldwork period (ie between 28 March and 31 March 1988, just prior to the Easter break). Their purpose is to give further insight into the characteristics of groups visited by the mobile unit and the nature of the sessions held.

Other comments:

> ***"Mothers had a meeting to discuss group monies as they need to pay $7 a session for the school rental. Parent donations need to go up to cover that. The public health nurse came and spoke to mothers about Hepatitis B vaccinations. Our severely handicapped, special needs child was present. Her therapist brings her and works with her for the session."***

MATAURA ISLAND: MONDAY AFTERNOON, 21 MARCH 1988

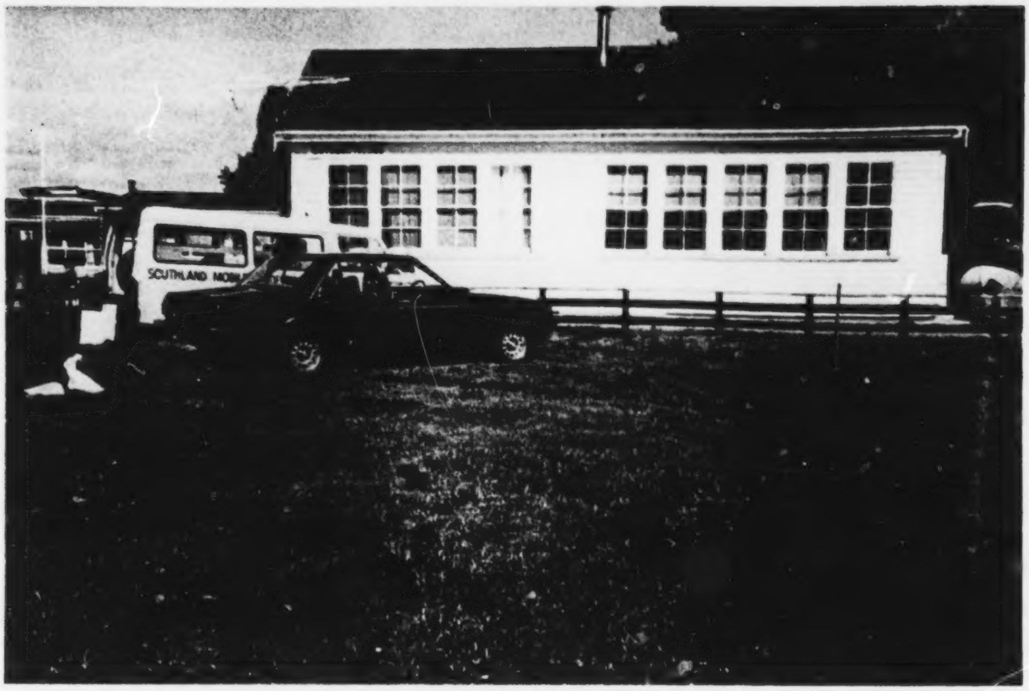
After an approximately 20 minute drive from Mimihau, the teachers arrived at the Mataura Island venue at 12.45am. (Despite its name, Mataura Island was neither an island - except perhaps when there was heavy flooding in the area - nor part of the Southland town of Mataura.) The community is a predominantly farming one, although a few of the families who attended the mobile unit simply lived in former farm cottages and commuted to Invercargill for work. (One boy was the son of the school principal while another child was from a family which owned a nearby grocery store.)

Facilities Available to the Group

The group met in the junior classroom of the Mataura Island primary school. On Monday afternoons, when the mobile unit group was scheduled to meet, the junior class teacher and her (at that time) 10 pupils moved to a different part of the school, where they had music, in order to leave the classroom free for the mobile unit group.

Because the mobile group's roll was considerably higher than that of the junior class and because there were desks and a great deal of other equipment used by the school children already there (there was, for example, a 'listening post' in one corner and a 'family area' with dolls and so on in another, as well as an abundance of posters, charts, and school children's art work on the walls and hanging from the ceiling), the room seemed confined, and lacking in the space necessary for maximum programme flexibility.

The junior classroom was somewhat separate from the rest of the school and situated within its own well-fenced playing area. The classroom was reached via a short flight of steps and a narrow passage leading from the outside door. In this hallway, which was in full view of anyone who was in the classroom itself, there were shelves containing School Journals and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The Mataura Island venue

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other publications, a sink-bench below which were a number of cupboards used for storing paper and other materials, and a carpentry table plus wood and tools. (The carpentry table, shared by the school children and the pre-schoolers, was left permanently set up. Although there was not a great deal of spare room, the teachers also set up the dough table in this area. They did not have water play at this session but when they did, the water tank was usually set up in the hallway as well.)

Although some rearrangement (such as moving some desks together to make a larger work surface) was necessary, the mobile unit teachers tried to move as little of the school children's belongings as possible (especially as they liked to ensure that they left the room as they had found it) and simply adjusted themselves to the restrictions imposed by the venue. Despite lack of space in the classroom, the teachers nevertheless managed to fit the quadro into one corner while their supply of Lego and Duplo was made available in the school children's 'family corner'. Other activities, such as puzzles and collage work were spread out on desks which had been pushed together.

The Session

When the teachers arrived, one of the two parents rostered to help was already there. She helped the teachers unload the van and set up the session, about 10 minutes work in all. As well as the parent-helper, there was also an enthusiastic group of school children who came running over to help unpack as soon as they saw the mobile pre-school unit van. They knew the teachers well and always enjoyed the opportunity to come and talk to them.

Fifteen children over the age of three years attended the session. There were also two younger children present with their parents. (The teachers commented towards the end of the session that about eight of the enrolled-age children, plus several under-three-year-olds who usually attended the group, were absent on this occasion; they thought that they had probably accompanied their parents to watch older siblings participate in a sports event organised by the Wyndham School. The teachers further remarked that the session seemed really quiet and peaceful with the fewer than usual people - both children and parents - present. On occasions when all children and a large group of parents were all inside the classroom at once, both the noise level and the availability of work-space became problematic.)

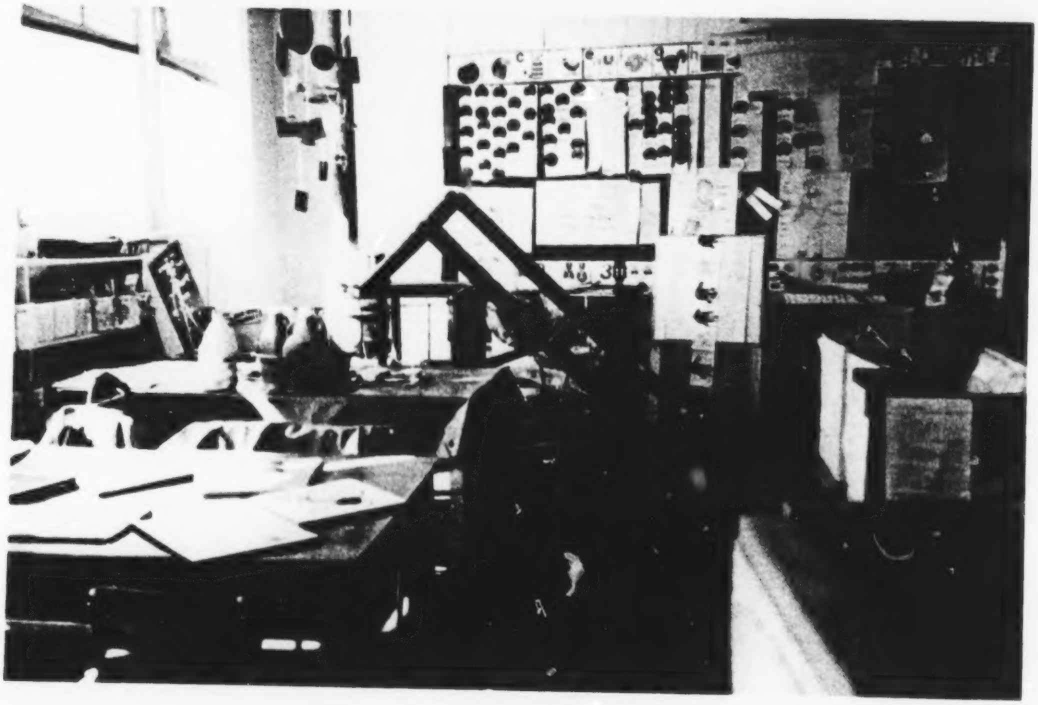
With the exception of the water tank which was not put out, all equipment and activities at this session were basically the same as those available at the morning session at Mimihau. As for the other session, there was no outside play.

Because afternoon sessions were only two hours in length (on this occasion, from 12.55pm to 2.55pm) the parent group at Mataura Island had elected not to have an afternoon tea break either for themselves or the children, preferring to wait until they returned home. A mid-afternoon mat-time was not scheduled either.

Until the large group activity took place towards the end of the session, the teachers divided their time amongst children working on the various activities. The first teacher, for instance, discussed with a boy working with Lego in the family corner the new pieces which had recently been added to the supply (the child, a keen user of the Lego, was enthusiastic about the new additions, and quick to realise that he would be able to make a wider range of constructions than before), demonstrated to one of the smaller children how to cut shapes out of dough and talked with others also working at the dough table, encouraged, on three or four different occasions, small groups modelling with clay to be more adventurous with it and to talk about what the clay felt like to touch in comparison with some other substances (eg dough), supervised those using the slide, helped children prepare to form 'Easter egg' shapes using sponges dipped in paint, worked - along with two or three parents and the other teacher - on helping children complete their Easter bunny finger puppets, helped a boy and, later, a girl complete puzzles, and assisted two other children to make simple constructions out of Duplo.

Modelling with clay, Mataura Island

Indoors at the Mataura Island venue



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She also spent five minutes exclusively with one almost-five-year-old child, on 'extension activities'. These involved worksheets stuck into the child's 'homework' book; the worksheets on this occasion required the child, for example, to indicate objects which were 'the same or different' and to indicate from a series of pictures, which item was 'missing'.

As well as working with the children, the teacher spent time talking with parents. Her conversations with parents included topics of general interest, giving information about the activities planned for the following week's session and the need for parents to supply their child with a hard boiled egg, the purchase of chocolate Easter eggs as a surprise for the children at next week's session, children's behaviour at home, the progress that one of the children was making with her speech therapist, and the price of Lego and suggestions about the best pieces for the parent to buy initially for her child to use at home.

The other teacher spent the first 40 to 50 minutes of the session helping a series of children complete their finger puppets; while she was helping the children, she not only conversed with them about the task at hand but on a range of other topics as well. She also chatted to the two or three parents who were assisting her from time to time. Around 2pm, the teacher spent time supervising children on the slide before moving on to chat to five others working with puzzles; she remained with these children for several minutes. At one point she also discussed with two or three children what some painters were doing. (Part-way through the session, two painters began working in and around the classroom; although one or other of the men came into the classroom on more than one occasion to clean around the windows and were visible outside the rest of the time, the children, after the first few minutes, paid them very little attention.)

At approximately 2.25pm all but two of the youngest children went into a small library adjoining the classroom for singing and other activities. (While two parents chose to stay and observe, the remaining five parents, together with the two children who did not participate, remained in the classroom.) One teacher began by getting the group to do one or two finger plays (the other teacher sat with the children and assisted any child who did not know what to do). After finger play, the teacher read to an attentive group a story about a child who became very jealous of her new baby brother. (This was the only story read at this session. The children, teachers, and parents had been so occupied with other activities that there had been no time to read stories; in any case, no child had requested a story and, on this occasion, no child borrowed a library book to take home.) The teachers then changed places, with the teacher at the front of the group now leading the children for singing (including action songs) while accompanying them on guitar. The children sang - and performed - with evident enjoyment such songs as 'The big grey cat is sleeping... etc'; they also pretended to be scarecrows, mice, and a number of other characters or creatures. Before sitting down quietly again they also moved about the room hopping, skipping, blinking their eyes, putting their hands on their heads, etc, depending on what was suggested by the tempo of the music which the teacher was playing. As soon as they were seated, the teachers explained that each child was to bring a hard-boiled egg along to the next session. (She also handed out notices about this for them to give to their parents.) The proposed activity generated considerable discussion, with several children volunteering comments about the hens which their families kept and about the number and size of the eggs that were laid. The session ended with the group singing one more song.

As the parents had completed all of the tidying up and most of the packing of the van while the large group activities were underway, the teachers had very little to do at the end of the session other than chat to several parents who had come to collect their children. The teachers arrived in Invercargill at 3.40pm after an approximately 40 minute drive from the Mataura Island venue.

Parents

Seven parents remained throughout the session. (As mentioned earlier, this was fewer than usual.) While the two parents on duty were chiefly responsible for 'housekeeping' tasks, most of the other parents helped with these as well. In addition, almost all of the parents present worked with the children during the session, particularly with children making finger puppets, using the dough, and working with puzzles. The parents also spent considerable time chatting amongst themselves and to the teachers. At other times they observed the session in progress and supervised the two youngest children present.

Comments from the Teacher Diaries (28/3/88)

Best/worst things about the session:

> ***"The painters were scratching paint off the windows all session! The session was excellent though."***
>
> ***"Several mothers around during the session meant that it was a little more difficult to be with children individually. This eased as the session moved along and we were able to spend time with children alone."***

Other comments:

> ***"Always lots of mothers here. Most are good at staying in the other room [ie away from where children are working so as to minimise noise and crowding] but children are inclined to wander through. The mother-helps at this group are always good as are the mothers of the under-threes [ie they supervise them well]."***
>
> ***"The number of younger children present made the session busy, but they were well supervised by their mums and on the whole the session was really good with a quiet, happy atmosphere."***
>
> ***"We use the school room at this venue so it's fairly crowded with furniture. Don't like to shift things around too much."***

WAIMATUKU: TUESDAY MORNING, 22 MARCH 1988

The teachers arrived at the Waimatuku venue at 9.05am after a 20 minute drive in a westerly direction from Invercargill. As the session was not scheduled to begin until 9.30am, there was plenty of time for unpacking the van and setting up the session.

Facilities Available to the Group

The group met at the Waimatuku School, a small country school of long standing. At the time the fieldwork was carried out this was a one-teacher establishment. Of the two classrooms available, one was used solely by the mobile unit (except on the odd occasion when the school children used it for concerts and other special events) and the group was therefore able to leave some equipment permanently set up between sessions.

The classroom walls were painted pale yellow and, along the rear wall there was a type of board, painted green, which had once been used to display school children's paintings and other craft work. As there was no longer any of the school children's work in the room, the board, which had obviously been well-used in the past, looked shabby. (Although there were a few examples of the pre-schoolers' work here and there, there was not enough to disguise the many drawing-pin holes visible in the board.) A generous number of tall, uncurtained windows on either side of the room, however, made the room seem bright and cheerful.

Blackboards extended the length of two walls and, on one side of the room, there was a bench containing a sink; store cupboards were located beneath the bench and at one end of it.

As well as a variety of tables of different sizes and heights (most, though, were of a suitable height for the pre-schoolers), there were also chairs, several old, wooden school-desks pushed against one wall, a sofa, a piano, and a pot-belly stove - surrounded by a guard - in one corner. The floor was covered in pale-coloured linoleum; pieces of polythene placed under the water tank and painting easels during sessions protected it from spilled water or paint. There was also a large mat at the rear of the room; this was where the children worked with Lego.

Equipment used by the group and left permanently at the venue included painting easels, a bookstand and a supply of books (these could be borrowed by the children on a lending library basis), a collection of materials for collage work, a wooden scooter and a set of wooden blocks (neither of these were used at the session described below), a play oven, a carpentry bench (the teachers brought tools and supplies of wood with them in the van when wood-work was scheduled as an activity - on this occasion it was not), and a line with pegs attached, strung up over the sink-bench, on which to hang paintings to dry.

The Waimatuku venue

The Session

Both of the women who were rostered for duty arrived at the venue almost at the same time as the teachers. With their help it took only about five minutes to unload the van and set up the session. (Although the van had to be parked outside the school gate it was necessary to carry the equipment only a short distance into the classroom.) The two children who accompanied the parent-helpers began using the dough and playing at the water tank as soon as these were available (about 9.10am).

The water tank, together with funnels, water-wheel, and various containers, was placed just inside the classroom door, while the quadro was positioned at the back of the room. (Again, these was no outdoor play at this session.) Other equipment from the van included a selection of six puzzles which were spread out on a low table, dough plus cutters and rolling pins, collage materials, scissors, sellotape, and glue, clay and the small hessian-covered table to work at while modelling, four small wooden stools, crayons and paper for the toddlers to use, paints, brushes, and paper for using at the easels, the containers of Lego/Duplo, and the items necessary for carrying out the theme activities of making finger puppets and Easter egg designs using sponges dipped in trays of thin, brightly-coloured paint.

As the morning was overcast with a cold wind, one of the parents lit the pot-belly stove; by the time all other parents and children had arrived in time for the 9.30am start, the room was beginning to feel comfortably warm. A total of 10 children attended the session; amongst this number were three children under the age of three years. (The teachers commented that this was one of their 'youngest' groups - ie most children were less than four years old. This, they said, made it more of a challenge to provide suitable activities for the group while still maintaining some continuity with their other seven groups when planning and implementing their programme for the mobile unit overall.) No child was old enough to be given one of the 'homework' books as these were reserved for children with only a few months to go before attending school.

After being greeted by the teachers when they entered the classroom (one boy had made a paper dart and apparently found it difficult to contain himself, he was so eager to show it to the teachers the moment he came in the door), each child placed his or her bag and coat on the sofa at the back of the room. As for the two sessions already described, the first part of the session involved the children moving around the various activities available on a free-play basis. During this time, one of the teachers concentrated on helping children complete their finger puppets while the other circulated amongst small groups of children working elsewhere in the room.

While working with the children doing finger puppets, the teacher chatted at length with the children. With one boy, this became a 'proper' conversation, with the child eager to tell the teacher about his birthday party of a few days ago and the presents he had received. Later, after admiring three children's completed Easter bunnies, she sent them over to the other teacher so that they could display their work to her. (This they did without hesitation, before returning to talk to the other teacher again.)

Interior view of the Waimatuku venue

After helping all but one very young child complete a finger puppet, the teacher went to sit with four - and then five - children building with Duplo and/or Lego. Mainly, she just chatted with these children while watching what they were doing, but occasionally offered a suggestion or explained why it would be better, in order to achieve their purpose, if they were to approach the task in a different way. After 10 minutes with this group, the teacher spent five or so minutes with children at the dough table (one was a toddler), before showing an under-three-year-old how to do a sponge painting. In addition to working with the children, the teacher chatted with the two parent-helpers and to the secretary of the mobile unit's management committee. (The committee secretary called in part-way through the session to talk over a matter relating to the mobile unit; she also lingered for a further 15 minutes or so to watch proceedings and chat to some of the children that she knew.)

Preparing to do a 'sponge painting', Waimatuku

While children were awaiting their turn to embark on the finger puppet activity, the other teacher, as well as carrying out 'caregiving' activities, worked with them on various activities of their choice. For instance, while also chatting to one of the mothers, she, like the other teacher, helped one of the youngest children do a sponge painting, admired several children's completed paintings and other work, put aprons on children preparing to play at the water tank, hung up paintings to dry, conversed with a child sitting at the puzzle table, sorted puzzle pieces (which had become jumbled) ready for other children to use, instructed a child on how to fit pieces of Duplo together and talked with three others working alongside this child about what they were building, and sat, on two different occasions, for five or so minutes with a small group using clay (at the same time keeping an eye on children on the slide). A five-year-old school girl from the adjacent classroom - she was a recent 'graduate' from the mobile unit group - also called in to have a brief word with this teacher. (The teachers commented that they were hoping shortly to implement their plan of having the small group of five-year-olds join in during the mobile unit session each week; they and the school teacher felt it would be of benefit for both the school children and the pre-schoolers.) At one point, the teacher led one little girl, too shy to go by herself, over to the other teacher so that the child could show the painting she had done. Although she did not speak, the child smiled when the other teacher admired her efforts.

Both teachers, with the help of the parents on duty and two or three children, began some preliminary tidying up at 10.40am in readiness for mat-time and morning tea. While one teacher (the teachers took turns to do this at alternate sessions) continued to tidy up and pack equipment ready for loading into the van, the other teacher conducted the mid-morning mat-time. She began by getting the group of nine children (the tenth child, a toddler, remained with her mother) to do one or two finger plays, explaining, for the benefit of the youngest children, what they must do at various points of the tales she was narrating. Following a short discussion about 'colours', she then read a story about 'The Meanies'. (Prior to mat-time, the teachers had had a short discussion about which book to read; they wanted to ensure that their choice would appeal not only to the youngest of the group but to the older ones as well.) At the end of the story, the group were instructed to wash their hands for morning tea. The children were sent to wash their hands and collect their bags containing drinks and snacks in small groups or individually according to whether they were "boys", had "blue shoes", "shoes with laces", "blonde hair", and so on.

All children sat around a table to eat and drink together; the five parents present, and the teachers, chatted together while having a cup of tea and eating scones supplied by one of the women. The adults also chatted to the children and helped them to open drink bottles and food packages. All children were instructed to put rubbish in the bin provided when they had finished.

The 'large-group activity' took place from 11.05am. To begin, the teachers had the children take part in the hide-and-guess game in which a child was hidden under a blanket, leaving the remaining children to guess who was missing. At first, only six children participated; the game was unfamiliar to the four youngest children and they seemed to prefer just to observe. After watching two or three children 'disappear' and then reappear, however, two more children - at the teachers' invitation - also joined in.

The group then went on to sing songs - as usual, the head teacher accompanied them on guitar. Both teachers also helped the children learn the actions to two new songs before going on to sing a song which incorporated the name of each child - except that, instead of pronouncing the name correctly, each name was sung as if it began with a 'W' (eg 'Jessica' became 'Wessica' and 'Timothy' became 'Wimothy'). This struck the children as very funny and there was a lot of giggling. The session ended at 11.30am with a short discussion about the Easter activities planned for the following week and the teachers handing out completed paintings and finger puppets to their owners, along with a notice to give to their parents about supplying a hard-boiled egg.

At the close of the session, the teachers spent two or three minutes completing the packing of the van (the parents had done most of this), asked, on a child's behalf, one of the parents to issue a library book, and spent a further 10 minutes chatting to parents (including two who had not been at the session but had come to collect their children) before driving to the afternoon session at Fairfax.

Although the teachers felt that better use of their time would very likely be made if this, the smallest of their groups, was closed, thus freeing them to run a session elsewhere for a larger number of children, they nevertheless enjoyed working with both the children and parents at Waimatuku. They found the parents to be helpful and friendly and enjoyed the extent of one-to-one interaction that was possible with such a small group of children, especially as they found the children responsive and eager to please.

Parents

Five parents remained at the venue throughout the session, although until morning tea-time three (and for a short time, four) of these parents sat in the school office so they could knit and chat together without disturbing, or being disturbed by, the children. They also took the opportunity to complete the parent questionnaire for this study.

As well as housekeeping tasks, the two parents who had been rostered for duty helped children with their finger puppets and, more briefly, interacted with children participating in other activities (eg one encouraged a toddler to spend some time drawing with crayons).

Just prior to morning tea, all five parents helped prepare tables for the children's morning tea; they also swept the floor, washed dishes, and completed most tidying and packing up of equipment while the teachers were involved with the large group activity. When they had finished these tasks, all five watched the music session in progress, sometimes singing along too and encouraging the toddler in their midst to clap her hands and so on where appropriate.

One parent commented to the researcher how much she valued the friendly atmosphere of the group and that she very much liked the amount of one-to-one interaction that was possible between teachers and children in a small group such as theirs.

Comments from the Teacher Diaries (29/3/88)

Best/worst aspects of session:

> *"The worst was unpacking in the rain."*

> *"Probably the weather was the worst! Best was the warm fire and atmosphere of cosiness."*

Other comments:

> *"Today's weather was particularly disagreeable and three children were absent, making the small group unusually smaller. The speech therapist attended to visit two of the children; these children left the group to talk with her. Overall, though, the session was pleasant and happy."*

> *"Our very small group. I feel we would be better using our time elsewhere and these children could attend the Waianiwa group [ie one of the groups visited by the mobile unit] or go to Riverton kindergarten. Will be watching the size of the group and perhaps mention to District Officer about closing again. No one seems keen to close the group or be responsible for doing so."*

FAIRFAX: TUESDAY AFTERNOON, 22 MARCH 1988

After leaving Waimatuku, the teachers stopped for lunch at a small town en route to the Fairfax venue; they eventually arrived at the small village of Fairfax, 38 kilometres north-west of Invercargill, at 12.40pm.

Facilities Available to the Group

The group met in a classroom at the Fairfax School which, at the time of the fieldwork, was a sole-charge school; approximately 12 children attended it. The classroom, theoretically for the exclusive use of the mobile unit, was sometimes used by the school for activities such as film screenings - the school projector was kept in the room and there were black curtains at the windows which could be drawn when films were being shown. Because the school children had access to the room, the mobile unit did not leave any supplies of paper, paints, etc behind as it did at some other venues.

The classroom and its contents were similar to that described for the Waimatuku venue: that is, there were a generous number of windows which let in ample light, a pot-belly stove in one corner, a sink-bench with cupboards beneath it (tea, coffee, cups, and an electric jug belonging to the group were stored here), a piano, blackboards, a variety of (mainly child-sized) tables and chairs, old wooden school-desks, painting easels, a play oven, and carpentry table. The floor was covered in linoleum patterned in a marbled design (kept clean and highly-polished by the parents) but several large, gaily-patterned carpet squares added some comfort. A white ceiling, red-painted walls, and a display of the children's work made the room look cheerful and bright.

Interior views (prior to commencement of the session), Fairfax venue

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The Session

Parents and children were a little late arriving at the session. The teachers had therefore completed the unpacking and setting up process (this required some rearrangement of tables) well before anyone arrived. Most of the 19 children and four parents who eventually arrived were, however, present by 1.10pm. Two of the five girls and 14 boys who attended were under the age of three years (one was a toddler, the other a baby) while the remainder were aged between three years and four years six months. (The teachers commented that there were several absentees at this session; they did know of any particular reason for this.) Amongst the regular attenders was a little girl with impaired hearing. She wore aids in both ears. The teachers took care to take this into account in their interactions with her - and with one of the parents present who also suffered a significant hearing loss.

As soon as the children arrived and had been greeted by the teachers, they deposited their belongings on a shelf divided into compartments, one for each child.

The equipment and activities available were the same as those described for the previous session at Waimatuku; the same session format was also followed - ie with one teacher primarily concentrating on helping children complete finger puppets (the major theme activity) up until the afternoon tea-break and the other teacher circulating amongst children undertaking other activities. As could be expected given the philosophy of the mobile unit, there was no outside play.

Although, in most instances, children were observed to engage in parallel play (the teachers attributed this not only to the age of the children - parallel play is seen more amongst younger pre-schoolers - but to the fact that many seldom had an opportunity to meet their peers over the course of a week and were therefore shy with one another), five of the older children spent a considerable proportion of their time working associatively while building with Lego. The children - three girls and two boys - discussed what they were going to build, helped one another by sharing or swapping available pieces, and played a game with the various vehicles and other constructions that they had made.

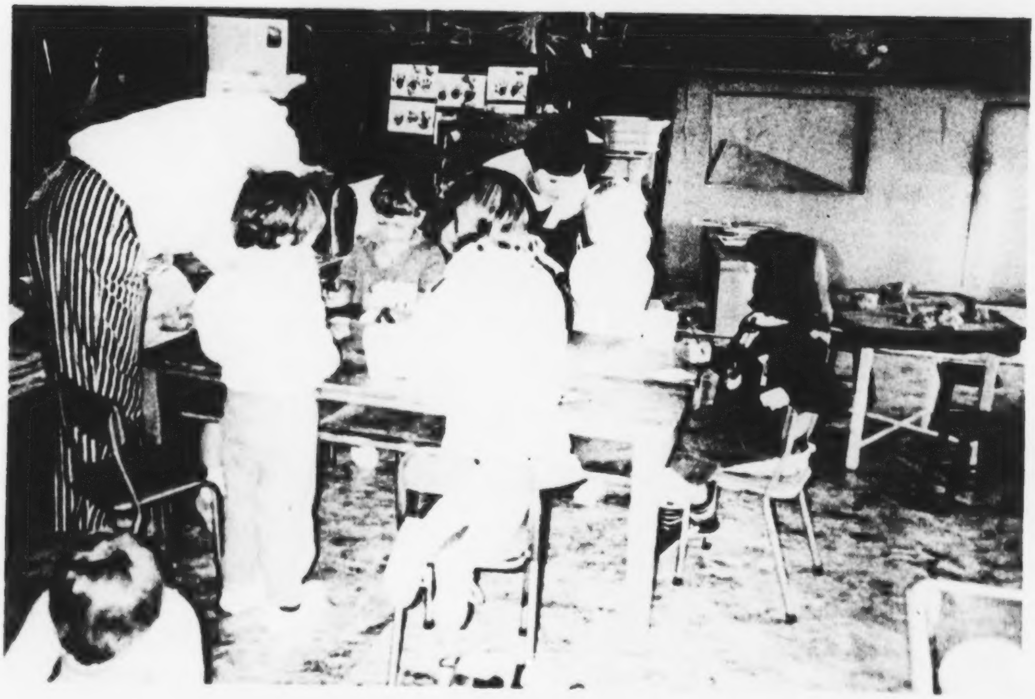
The head teacher spent five minutes with one child going through extension activities in his homework book. (He was the only child at this group 'old enough' for extension work.) Four other children gathered around to watch the teacher and child at work.

A teacher, with the help of one of the 'duty' parents and several children, began some preliminary packing up just prior to mat-time; mat-time began at 2.20pm.

Southland Mobile Pre-School Unit

Water play, Fairfax

Using Lego, Fairfax



Teacher and parent helping children making 'Easter bunny' finger puppets

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One of the parents had brought along a present for the head teacher as she knew it was her birthday later in the week. At the beginning of mat-time, the teacher showed the group what she had been given and invited the children to talk about birthdays in general; she also introduced the researcher and explained to the children what she was there for. Following a story about 'Old McDonald's Farm', the teacher led the group in singing - and acting out - the 'Old McDonald had a Farm' song. The children clearly enjoyed being the different animals and birds; they smiled and laughed frequently.

Once they had washed their hands and collected their bags, all children - except for the baby, who slept - sat around a table to have the food and drink they had brought from home. The parents and teachers supervised and chatted to the children while having their own afternoon tea - including delicious blackcurrant muffins baked by one of the mothers. Most children had finished their snack by 2.45pm; they then returned to the mat ready for the large group activity time.

To begin, the group played the 'hide-and-guess' game described in previous sessions. Although some of the younger children had to be taught what to do as the game proceeded, the group overall seemed to enjoy themselves very much - as when they sang about 'Old McDonald's Farm, the children laughed frequently; they also chattered amongst themselves (no longer as shy as they had been earlier in the session) and to the teachers, exclaiming enthusiastically when each hidden child suddenly reappeared. The session concluded at 3.05pm after the children had sung a few more songs, listened to what they had to bring along to the next session, and were reminded to collect a library book before going home. (All of the children at this session borrowed a book from the group's own stock of books; the parents had built up a good supply and added to it as the group's funds allowed.)

Before returning to Invercargill the teachers spent several minutes talking with parents (including two fathers) who had come to collect their children.

Parents

Three parents remained throughout the session (two because they were rostered for duty and one simply because she liked to come along and observe and/or work with the children) while another - a new parent - stayed until the afternoon break. (She left then because she had not brought any food for her child to have with the others.)

Afternoon tea-break, Fairfax

Parents tidying up while the group has music, Fairfax

One of the parents on duty was mainly responsible for housekeeping tasks - such as preparing the afternoon tea - and for supervising the youngest children, while the other worked entirely with the children (predominantly with those doing finger puppets) until mat-time, shortly before the tea-break. All three parents present at the time the large group activities were underway helped to pack equipment and clean and tidy up before sitting down - along with the toddler and baby - to watch the children singing.

During the session, one of the parents (she was a member of the group's parent committee) discussed the price of books with the head teacher and sought advice on the best books to buy to add to their 'library'. The head teacher also spent several minutes talking with the new parent (and her child) who had come along to enrol in the group. They talked about the nature of the programme and about the parent roster system. Before leaving part way through the session, this parent chatted to the three other parents and to the second teacher, and spent some time observing the session in progress.

Finally, the parents on duty helped children select a library book at the end of the session and showed some of the children the correct procedure for doing so.

Comments from the Teacher Diaries (29/3/88)

Best/worst aspects of session:

> ***"The noise level was very high today with extra mothers and toddlers present. A screaming baby at story time didn't help."***
>
> ***"Best would be the large attendance, worst probably the noise! This is a young, very busy group. Lots of little people participated actively!"***

Other comments:

> ***"The speech therapist visited five children during the session. A new child started. Lots of mothers were present to see the speech therapist. At this group there are only children up to the age of $4^1/_2$ years - no older children. The younger children don't seem to spend much time at activities. There are plenty waiting to attend this group [ie there is a long waiting list]."***
>
> ***"Weather improved this afternoon, so attendance was good. Large numbers of mothers attended which sometimes affects their children's attitude. We had***

excellent mother help but several mothers needed little chats about kindergarten behaviour etc."

WAIANIWA: WEDNESDAY MORNING, 23 MARCH 1988

Waianiwa is situated approximately 25 kilometres north-west of Invercargill. Like the other communities served by the Southland mobile pre-school unit, Waianiwa is predominantly farming-based; some of the families also commute to Invercargill or nearby towns - such as Riverton - for employment.

Facilities Available to the Group

The group met at the Waianiwa Primary school, a three-teacher establishment. While the school was of red-brick and quite modern, the mobile unit group had been given sole use of a much older, wooden building consisting of two classrooms and toilet facilities (probably, this was the original school building). The school was set in generously proportioned and well-tended grounds.

The group used one of the two classrooms at its disposal for setting out equipment and activities being used at the particular session, while the second classroom was used for music and other large group activities.

Both rooms had the high ceilings and tall sash windows typical of many older-style buildings. The floors were of unstained wood. In each of the rooms, the walls were painted in pale shades while the window frames were white; this, together with the amount of natural light (and, often, bright sunshine) which entered the building, made the rooms seem airy and uncluttered. Radiator heaters were used to warm the building.

The 'music room' contained very little other than a piano and a large mat for the children to sit on. In the other room, however, the group left some equipment permanently set out. This included four child-sized tables and various chairs, a rack on which to dry paintings, a carpentry table, a play oven, a supply of books stored on built-in shelves, one or two wooden bench seats, and several mats scattered about. One portion of the room had been screened off for use as a 'family corner'. This contained a dolls' house, some dolls, a dolls' cot, highchair, and pram, and some dressing up clothes. As well, some of the children's art work had been displayed on the pin-board at the back of the room and, hanging from the ceiling, was a large net (of the kind often used to protect ripening strawberries from birds) containing several paper-filled fish which had been crafted by the children on a previous occasion.

Finally, the group kept on storage shelves a set of wooden blocks, spare paper, biscuit cutters and a 'spaghetti maker' for using with dough, and carpentry tools. The equipment and materials already at the venue were supplemented at the session by what the teachers brought with them on the van - ie dough, clay (plus the special table to work at), wooden stools, painting materials, puzzles, books, water tank, quadro, Lego/Duplo, a supply of wood for children who chose to undertake wood-work, and items necessary for the two scheduled theme activities.

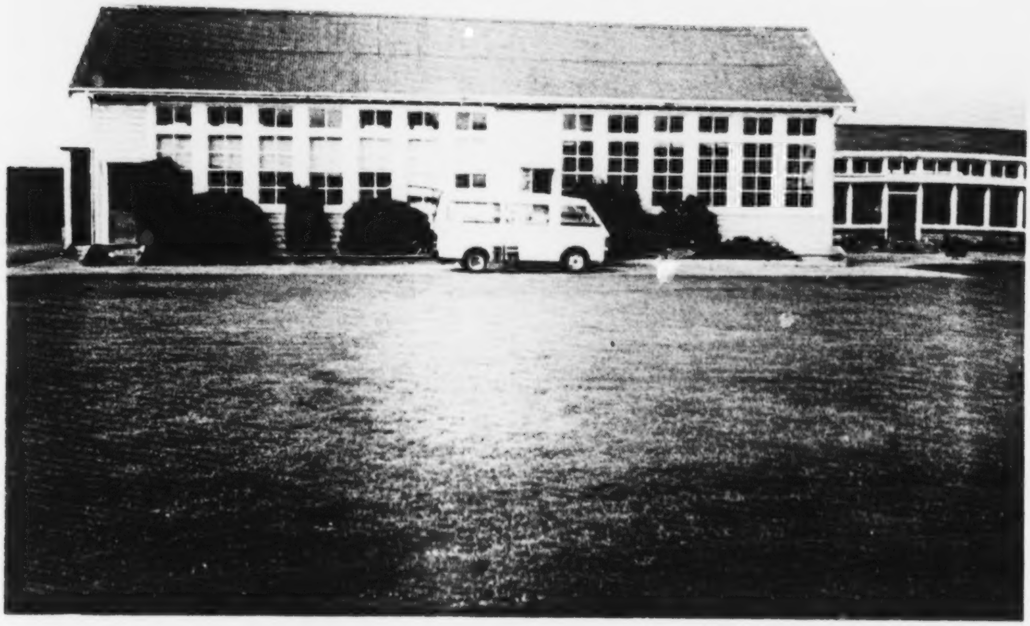
The Session

The teachers arrived at the venue at 9.12am. As the parents on duty had not yet arrived, the teachers completed most of the unpacking and setting-up themselves. This took only a few minutes as the work-tables were already in place and, because the van could be driven up close to the classroom door, it was not necessary to carry any of their equipment very far. Although the room felt very chilly to begin with, it warmed up quickly, especially as the sun came out part way through the morning, making it very pleasant in the classroom.

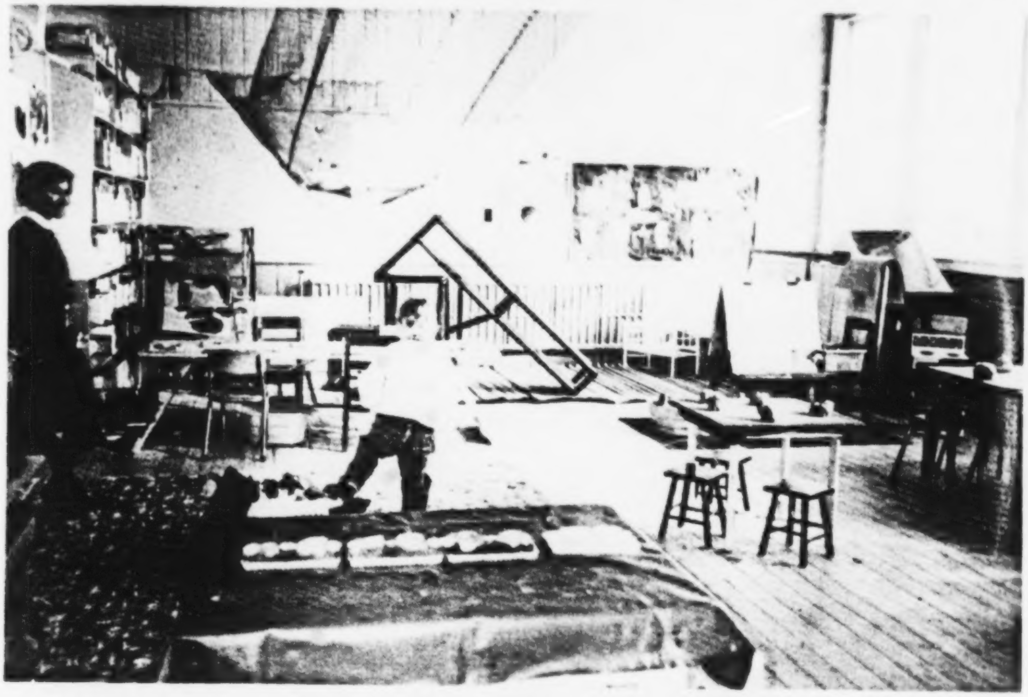
Twenty children attended the session; only one child was not officially enrolled. Amongst the children were a set of twins and three children almost old enough to go on to school. (During the morning, the head teacher spent several minutes with each of the last-mentioned children going through their homework books, working, for example, on the concepts of 'same' and 'different' and giving out stickers for work completed. While these interactions were taking place, one or two other children stopped what they were doing to come and observe.)

Throughout the free-play period - as at all previous sessions described above, the children remained inside for all activities - the teachers moved about the room helping and encouraging children as required (as almost all of the 20 children present completed a finger puppet, one teacher in particular, plus both parent-helpers, were kept busy assisting the children with these); the teachers also spent a considerable proportion of time just chatting to the children and, as usual, made a point of praising children for the work that they had done. All available activities were attempted by at least some of the children during the morning.

Apart from time spent making a finger puppet, half a dozen children spent almost all of their time building with Lego/Duplo. One child, for example, made a boat, while another made a car-park building, and yet another a train and carriages. (One or two children were observed showing what they had made to one of the parents; at different times, they were also seen discussing what they were doing with the teachers.)



The classrooms used by the Waianiwa group



Interior view of one of the Waianiwa classrooms - prior to 9.30am - showing teacher and child waiting for the rest of the group to arrive

Water play, Waianiwa

A number of children were observed to play associatively during the session (especially those working with the sets of Lego and Duplo); the teachers remarked that this was the only one of their eight groups where the children all seemed to know each other's names.

A four-year-old, new to the district and attending the mobile unit for the first time, was both confident and disruptive, with the result that he had to be reminded several times to quieten down and to await his turn patiently, as the other children did.

Children were called for mat-time shortly before 10.45am. A teacher read about 'The Meanies' and, as the group were so attentive throughout the story, read a second story (about going for a tram ride). A short group discussion about the stories followed; the children were then sent to wash their hands and collect their bags for morning tea (bags had been deposited just inside the classroom door as there were no special compartments at this venue in which to store belongings) according to whether they were "wearing shorts", were "girls with pig-tails", were "wearing a new jersey today", or had "stripes on their clothes".

The session in progress, Waianiwa

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Morning tea-time, taken together as a group between 10.56am and 11.08am, was an enjoyable social time for both children and adults. (Home-made baking was again supplied for teachers and parents.)

While waiting for the large group activities to begin, several children spent time looking at books which had been brought on the van. Perhaps because there was a higher proportion of older pre-schoolers at this group, the children seemed more interested in the books and stories than had been the case at one or two groups observed earlier in the week. (Almost all children present also borrowed a library book to take home with them at the end of the morning.)

The group moved into the second classroom, where there was plenty of room to spread out, for music and other activities undertaken as a group. While the head teacher played the piano, the children, and the other teacher who was in their midst, exercised and, as they moved about the room, pretended to be spiders and other creatures. They then played the hide-and-guess game and sang several songs (eg 'I had a cat and cat pleased me...'). The group, accompanied by the head teacher on guitar, sang very enthusiastically, especially the song (the 'Hey-dum-diddley' song) which the group requested shortly before the session's end. They sang it very loudly, clapping the rhythm as they went. The teachers commented that children at this group were always very good at performing their parts during action songs and caught on quickly when new movements were introduced.

Mat-time ended with the group talking about the activities planned for the following week. The children listened with considerable interest, with several children asking questions.

The session was a busy and productive one with the children entering into all the available activities. The favourable adult-to-child ratio (there were a total of five adults who worked with the children) allowed plenty of opportunity for interaction on a one-to-one or small group basis.

A member of the kindergarten association executive committee made a rare visit to the mobile unit. After interacting with many of the children, as well as observing proceedings and chatting to teachers and parents, she remarked at the end of the session how much she had enjoyed her visit.

Parents

The two parents rostered for duty not only carried out housekeeping tasks but also worked almost constantly with the children until it was time to prepare for morning tea. One other parent (accompanied by a toddler) stayed for the first hour or so to work with her four-year-old. Her son was reluctant to stay at sessions without her; she was, however, gradually reducing the time she spent with him because he was due to attend school in another month or so. (He seemed to settle without trouble once she had left.) Another woman, a grandmother, called in for several minutes to enrol her grandson and to talk about the mobile unit's 'rules' and procedures. Finally, a father came 15 minutes before the end of the session to collect his daughter; while he waited, he took the toddler who had accompanied him to watch the older children singing.

After one mother asked her for the recipe to make dough for her child at home, the head teacher wrote the recipe on the classroom blackboard, for the benefit of all who might want it.

Comments from the Teacher Diaries (30/3/88)

Best/worst aspects of session:

> ***"A good music session with only one mother present at it and no disruptive little people [ie toddlers]. All children took part today."***

> ***"Best maybe was the low attendance of mothers - there just seemed to be more room in the kindergarten."***

Other comments:

> ***"Fine but cold. Lovely warm room with radiator heating. Only two mothers present throughout the session today and one little one so it wasn't too crowded or noisy. All groups are giving chocolate Easter eggs to children to put in the baskets that they are making to contain a painted, hard-boiled egg. Today the chocolate eggs were added to the baskets when no one was looking and the children's surprise was amazing. They wondered all morning who put them there, and were they allowed to take them home? They were so funny to watch."***

SOUTH HILLEND: THURSDAY MORNING, 24 MARCH 1988

South Hillend (formerly called the Limehills group) was the most distant of the eight groups visited by the Southland mobile pre-school unit: it was 55 kilometres or an approximately 45-minute drive north of Invercargill via the town of Winton. The families from the surrounding Centre Bush-Limehills area, which used the service provided by the mobile unit, were mostly involved with farming - either farm owners or farm employees; a few children's fathers worked at the Alliance Freezing Works while one or two men from families owning smaller holdings worked in nearby towns to supplement income derived from the land.

Facilities Available to the Group

The group was very fortunate to have sole use of what had once been the South Hillend primary school. (One of the women who attended the session with her child said she had once taught at the school; she was sad to see it closed and the grounds becoming gradually more overgrown and unkempt - in spite of the working bees organised at regular intervals by the mobile unit's parent committee.)

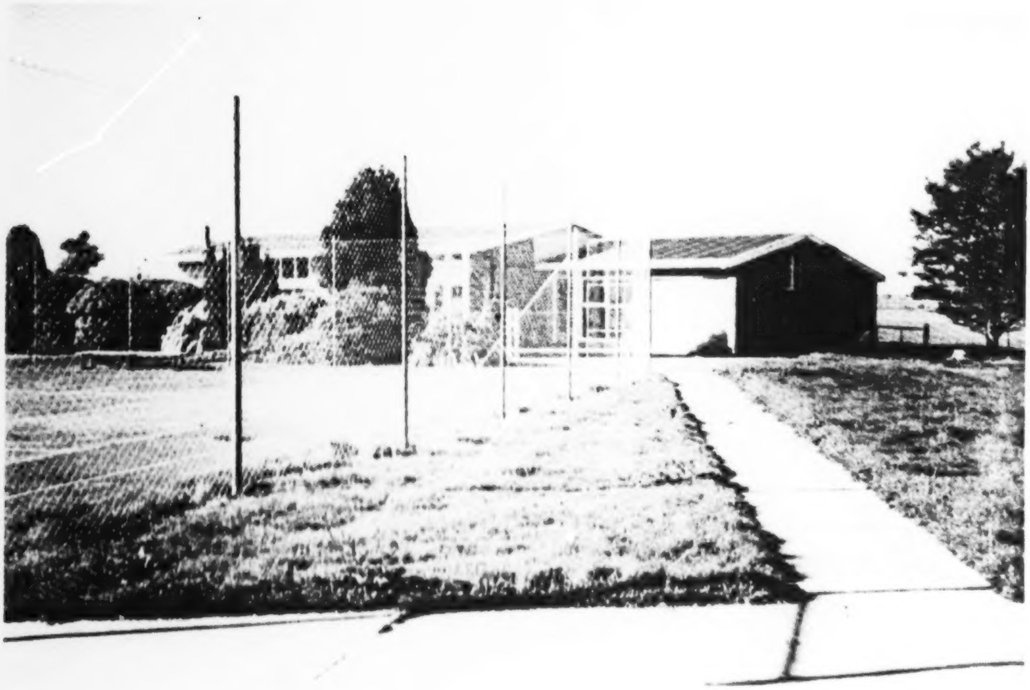
The school, which had a red-brick and wood exterior and was generously endowed with windows, consisted of two classrooms and a small staffroom-cum-office block. The school buildings, probably less than 20 years old, were set in generously proportioned and attractively landscaped grounds. There were well-established trees, a rockery and, as well as plenty of grass, large tennis courts (although, as indicated earlier, both the grass and the courts were showing the effects of neglect since a caretaker was no longer employed at the school).

As was the case at Waianiwa, the South Hillend group customarily used one of the classrooms available to it for activities undertaken on a free-play basis and the second classroom for large group activities such as music, games, and dancing.

The room in which most activities took place contained five tables for the children to work at, chairs, a pot-belly stove, shelves containing paper and other materials, painting easels, and several mats scattered about on the linoleum-covered floor. The room also contained a colourful display of the children's paintings and collage work on the walls (the walls were a combination of wood panelling, pin-board, and another type of board painted in pale yellow) and, hanging from the ceiling, a net containing several 'fish' which the children had made earlier in the year.

The room used for music, as well as being equipped with a mat big enough for all of the children to sit on at once, contained a large wooden hut, a wooden platform and slide, and a set of wooden interlocking construction toys (which, the teachers commented, were too difficult for pre-schoolers). This equipment had all been purchased by parents associated with the group; it was, however, seldom used because children generally chose to participate in the activities which the teachers had brought with them in the van.

Finally, along with two sofas and several chairs specifically for the parents' use, this group had elected to put their supply of children's books in what had once been the school staffroom. Children wishing to borrow a library book could then request any of the parents, who frequently spent time in there, to issue a book for them at the end of the session.



The former school used by the South Hillend group

The Session

When the teachers arrived at the venue at 9.17am, the two parents on duty were already there. They, together with their children, helped the teachers unpack and prepare for the session.

Twenty-four children attended the session, only two of whom were not officially enrolled. (These two children, however, were almost three years old and participated in most things, along with the older children.) Amongst the group were four-and-a-half-year old quadruplets and a set of twins. As well, there was a three-year-old with spina bifida and another child of four years described as exhibiting 'delayed learning behaviour'. (She was reported to have been deprived of oxygen for several minutes at the time of birth.) As soon as each child arrived and had been greeted by the teachers, she or he hung bag and coat on one of the hooks designed for the purpose in the corridor which connected the two classrooms.

Until morning tea-time, the session followed the same format as that described for previous sessions - ie the teachers worked with small groups or with individual children taking part in the Easter theme activities, as well as with those using the quadro, building with Lego, playing at the water tank, painting, and so on.

Working with Lego, South Hillend

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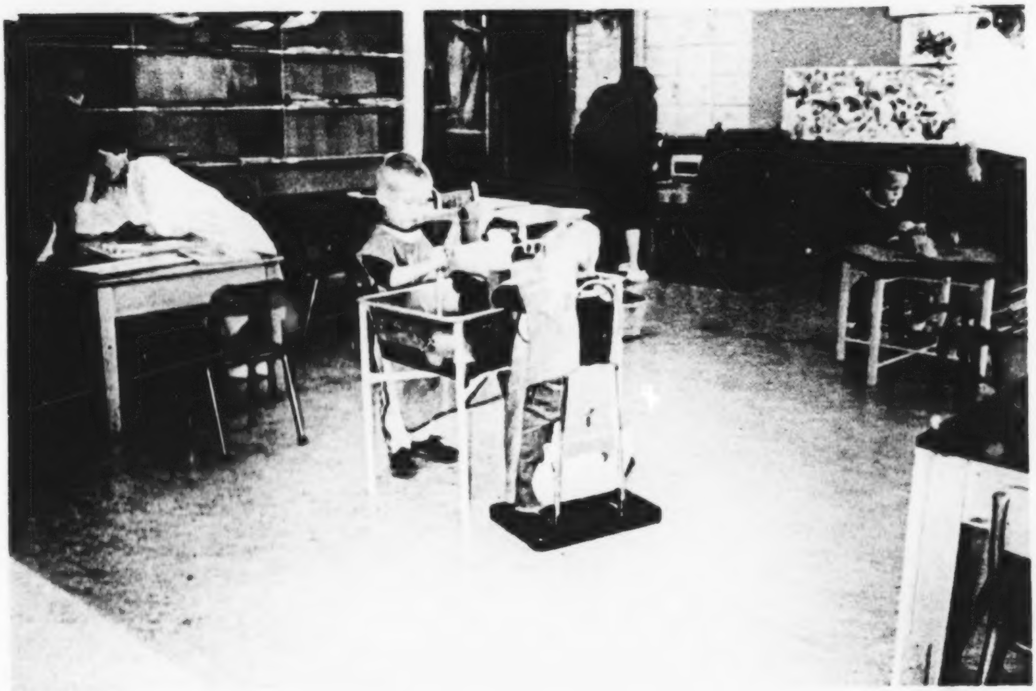
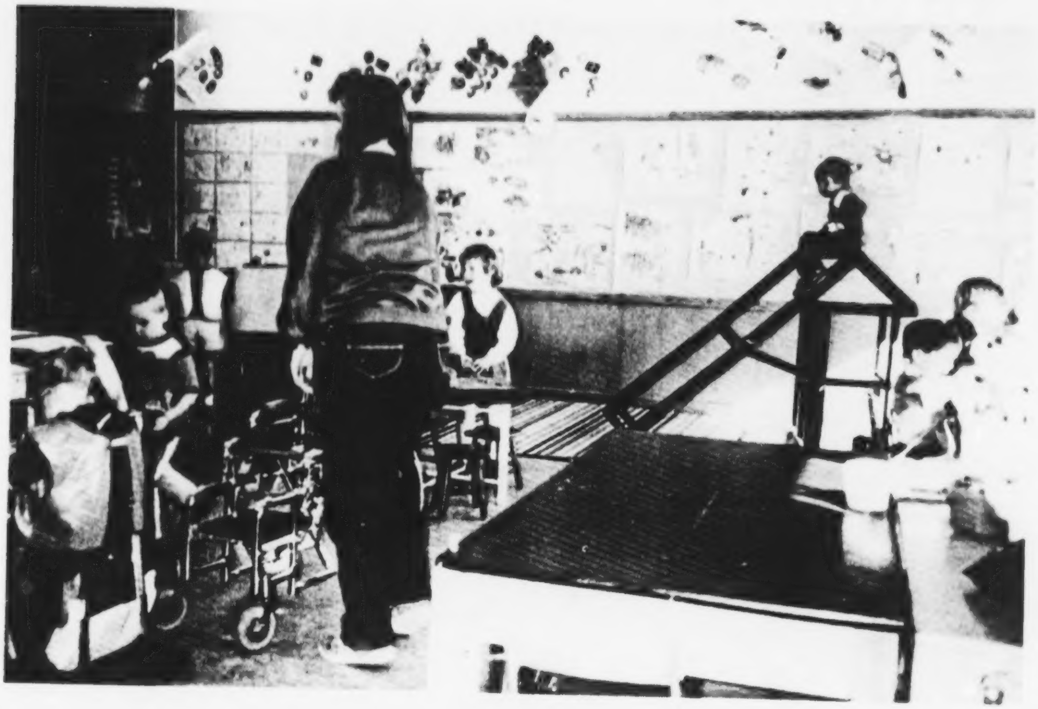
Teachers and children making finger puppets, South Hillend

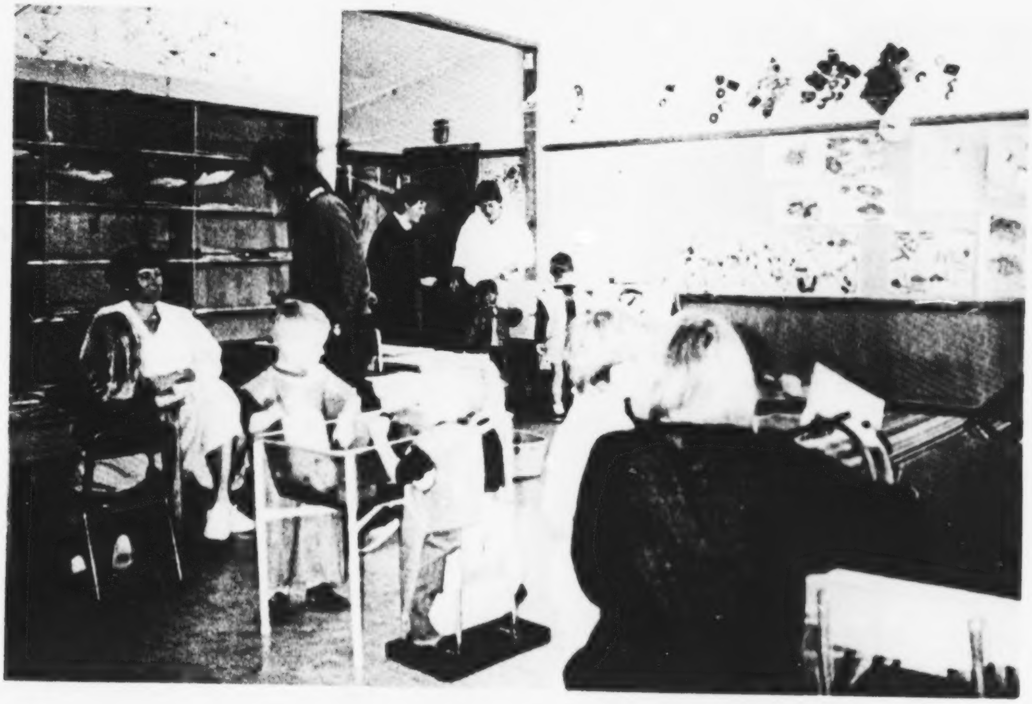


Water play, South Hillend

Southland Mobile Pre-School Unit



The session in progress, South Hillend



Southland Mobile Pre-School Unit

The head teacher worked on extension activities with two of the children - a boy and a girl. On this occasion, she worked with them at the same time, rather than separately. (As was often the case, two or three other children also came close to watch proceedings.) The teacher and the two children worked on concepts such as 'the same or different', numbers, and tasks which involved the children joining dots to find out what animal or object had been concealed by the unconnected dots. The teacher also gave the children coloured stars for the work they had done and explained how to go about the tasks she had 'set' for them to do at home before the next session.

Both teachers made a point of spending time with the 'developmentally delayed' child. The teachers reported that they felt she had been making good progress in recent weeks; for example, she now responded both verbally and with smiles when the teachers spoke to her. Previously, not only had she not spoken at all, but it had been almost impossible to establish eye-contact with her or get her to take part in activities along with the other children. On this occasion, she was observed to use the quadro slide - with the help of a teacher, make a finger puppet, again with assistance, work with dough, and play with Lego (although when she had difficulty getting two pieces to slot together she flew into a rage - fortunately, short-lived).

The child with spina bifida was very independent and, apart from asking one of the teachers at one point to lift her from her wheel-chair onto the floor (she could crawl, but not walk), she got on with the activities of her choice with little or no special assistance.

Another child, who sulked because she had to wait her turn to use scissors and other materials, was persuaded out of her mood by one of the teachers, she was soon smiling again and resumed her interrupted activities.

At 10.45am, all children went with one of the teachers into the 'music room' for mat-time. Mat-time began with the teacher inviting a boy whose fourth birthday it was to come up in front of the group and show everyone the presents he had received. This he very willingly did, chatting freely all the while. One of his presents was a xylophone; the teacher demonstrated to the group how this worked and played one or two short tunes on it. The group then listened to a story and, as the children were quiet and attentive, the teacher read them a second story. Shortly before 11am, the second teacher, who had been in the other room helping parents pack equipment, joined the group and informed the children that it was the head teacher's birthday. She had the 'birthday teacher' sit on the 'chair of honour' and placed on her head (much to the group's delight) the paper hat that she and several children had secretly made and decorated earlier in the session. The group then sang the 'happy birthday' song. At 11.02am, children were sent to wash their hands and collect their bags for morning tea according to whether they were "wearing something red", had "brown hair", and so on.

As it was an especially lovely day, being both sunny and calm, it was decided to have morning tea outside at this session. The parents on duty therefore carried two of the larger mats onto the concrete immediately outside the classroom windows for the children to sit on. The second teacher had brought along a chocolate cake in honour of the head teacher's birthday; each child was given a small slice of this. The parents who had been chatting together in the 'staffroom' joined the teachers and children so that they too could enjoy their morning break in the sun. (Parents at this group customarily brought along a generous supply of home baking to share amongst themselves and today was no exception.)

Morning tea concluded at 11.15am; once the children had put any rubbish in the bin and returned their bags to their rightful place inside, the entire group went onto the tennis courts to play ball games and roll hula hoops about. Everyone - both children and adults - seemed to enjoy these activities in such a pleasant, sunny environment, as there was plenty of talking and laughing.

Playing ball games, South Hillend

For the final few minutes of the session (which ended at 11.35am), the group returned to the music room to sing 'happy birthday' to the child whose birthday it was, and to sing one or two other songs. The head teacher, still wearing her party hat, accompanied the group on guitar. Finally, the teachers explained to the children about activities planned for the next session and gave out notices for their parents about bringing along a hard-boiled egg.

The atmosphere throughout the session was not only busy, but also happy and relaxed.

Parents

The two parents rostered for duty, plus two others, were present throughout the session, while six parents, although they remained at the venue, spent much of the morning chatting together in the school staffroom. (One of these parents travelled 52 kilometres - one way - in order to bring her child to sessions; this was one reason why she preferred to remain at the venue.) Parents associated with the South Hillend group regularly used the staffroom as a place to meet during sessions; they clearly valued their time together as an important social event.

The head teacher also spent five minutes chatting to a parent at the beginning of the session before the parent left again. Still another parent called in with her three-year-old at about 9.45am. She too spent several minutes chatting to teachers and one or two parents before going on her way. (The toddler who accompanied her screamed loudly as her mother prepared to depart; she wanted to stay with the other children!)

The four parents who stayed with the group rather than in the staffroom, interacted constantly with the children (including calming the child who had a tantrum when she found building with Lego more frustrating than fun), as well as helping prepare for morning tea, tidying up and packing equipment. One parent also gave the room a thorough sweeping.

During the session, the head teacher spent several minutes talking with a parent about putting together a basket of activities, books, etc for her child to take into hospital with her. There were also many opportunities for all parents present to talk together and with the teachers.

Comments from the Teacher Diaries (30/3/88)

Best/worst aspects of session:

> ***"It was 'teachers only day' at the school which resulted in two older sisters coming for the session and they were very helpful."***
>
> ***"The quads brought their white rabbits which everyone loved, and one of the other girls actually conversed with me when normally she is so shy and won't talk at all!"***

Other comments:

> ***"The quads brought their rabbits which everyone enjoyed nursing. The surprise over the chocolate Easter eggs was a wonder to watch too. The children asked 'when did the Easter Bunny put them in the baskets?' A new child started."***

DRUMMOND: THURSDAY AFTERNOON, 24 MARCH 1988

Drummond is a small township located approximately 35 kilometres north-west of Invercargill.

Facilities Available to the Group

The venue for this group was the Drummond primary school, a two-teacher establishment. (The teaching principal there was also the father of one of the children attending the group.) No longer used by the school, the building allocated to the Drummond group had once been the 'infant block'. This was a very old, wooden structure standing apart from the more modern school building; wire netting covered the windows (there were tennis and netball courts immediately in front of the building and the netting was presumably to protect the windows from being broken). A broad entrance hall led into the former infant classroom; the hall contained pegs along one wall for the children to hang their coats and bags on (each child had been allotted his or her own particular place), two hand basins, and some shelves and cupboards. At the end of the hall, just before the classroom itself, was a small kitchen area - this contained more cupboards, a sink, a bench, and a Zip unit for heating water. Floor to ceiling curtains allowed this area to be screened off from the main room if desired.

Despite its age, the building had been well maintained both inside and out. The main classroom had a generous number of tall windows which, along with an extensive and colourful display of children's work on the walls, made the room seem cheerful and bright.

The feeling of spaciousness and light was further helped by the walls being painted in a pale blue shade and the window frames and ceiling in white. Although the floor was of unstained wood, there were several large mats scattered about for the children to work and play on.

SOUTHLAND MOBILE KINDERGARTEN

The former 'infant block' used by the Drummond group

The only others to use the building aside from the pre-schoolers were the local Brownies. The Drummond mobile unit group was therefore able to leave furniture and some other equipment and materials permanently at the venue. The room contained several low tables for the children to work at, chairs and stools, painting easels, a large cupboard containing supplies of paper, glue, scissors, collage materials, etc, a line on which to hang paintings to dry, two carpentry tables (these were kept in the kitchen area), and a large wooden 'hut' with cushions inside it in one corner (the teachers commented that the hut was something of a nuisance because they felt it took up room which could be put to better use). As well as the furniture and other things gathered together by the group itself, permanent fixtures included a pot-belly stove and a large blackboard on one wall. Toilet facilities were outside.

The Session

When the teachers arrived at the venue at 12.45pm (after having lunch at a tea-shop en route from the morning venue at South Hillend), the two parents who had been rostered for duty were already there and had unlocked the building. With the parents' help, and that of the children who had accompanied them, the teachers had the van unpacked and everything set up in good time for the session to begin at 1pm. (The two children who arrived early played with the supply of Lego as soon as they had helped unpack it from the van.)

Twenty-one children attended the session; only one of these children was under three years of age - he had accompanied one of the mothers rostered to help.

One small boy (approximately three-and-a-half years of age), dropped off by his mother, began the afternoon in a very distressed state. As soon as his mother left him, he screamed and screamed and despite the solicitude of several adults, appeared inconsolable. Although he gradually became quieter, he was still standing by the outside door crying almost quarter of an hour after his arrival. Finally, after consultation with the other teacher, the head teacher decided that a firm approach was called for; she collected the child from the hall, took his hand and left him no choice but to come into the main room with everyone else. Ignoring his crying, she chatted to him, talking about all the interesting things he could be doing. Shortly afterwards, he was quiet and sitting on a mat choosing pieces of Lego to work with!

As well as all the activities available at sessions described above, a portable sandpit, along with a box of metal vehicles and tools from the van for using in the sandpit, were brought out and placed in the hall for the children's use. The pattern of the session, as usual, incorporated a period of free play (this included spending time on theme activities) followed by mat-time, a tea-break and, finally, a period spent working as a large group. The session was conducted entirely indoors.

Early in the session, the head teacher spent five minutes going through a girl's homework book; the child clearly enjoyed the tasks she was sharing with the teacher because she chatted at length and smiled often. Watched throughout by another child, they worked, amongst other things, on number concepts. After a short interval during which both teachers had a conversation with a child working with Lego, the head teacher went through homework completed by another child - this time, a boy.

Approximately 40 minutes after the session began two children asked if they could play at the water tank. As this had not yet been filled, the head teacher had these two children help her fill buckets with cold water and empty them into the tank. (She also poured in some hot water from the Zip unit.) Once bubbles and colouring had been added to the water and they had been helped to put aprons on to protect their clothing, these two children plus two others were ready to begin water play; this kept them happily occupied for some time.

For the remainder of the free play period, the head teacher supervised children using the quadro slide, talked with five children and a parent sitting at the dough table, successfully encouraged a child who did not seem to know what to do with himself to work with Lego, admired several children's completed finger puppets and sponge paintings (each teacher encouraged children to show what they had done to the other teacher; this was not only to ensure positive feedback for the children but to encourage in the children the idea of sharing), offered suggestions and advice to boys and girls working at the carpentry benches (from time to time there was some very loud hammering, indicative of the hard work going on there), and checked on children (at first only one child but later three children) playing in the sandpit. At 2.23pm, the head teacher enlisted the help of several children and, along with the parents, began some preliminary packing up, ready for mat-time. The one toddler present screamed in anger when he discovered his mother was emptying the water tank; the head teacher diverted him by explaining that mat-time was about to begin and he would be able to listen to a story. He was appeased.

As there was a large group of children present, the second teacher was kept fully occupied until after 2 o'clock helping various children complete finger puppets. She was assisted by two of the parents for much of this time. The second teacher also spent several minutes with three children who were modelling with clay; amongst other things these children had formed Easter baskets and various animal-shapes with the clay. Later, she conversed with three boys who had worked cooperatively to make a large boat out of Lego, admired paintings completed or still underway, and joined in with the others to help tidy up, keeping an eye on two children in particular by instructing them on the best way to go about packing equipment into its rightful containers, and so on.

At 2.30pm, the second teacher took the entire group for mat-time, beginning with finger plays and ending with a story about 'Georgie Grub', a child who did not like to wash. The story generated some condemnatory remarks from the children about Georgie's unclean state and a general discussion about having baths. Before being sent to wash their hands and collect their bags for afternoon tea according to whether they had "shoelaces in their shoes" etc, the teacher explained that it was the head teacher's birthday. Mat-time concluded with the children singing 'happy birthday'; several children, encouraged by the second teacher, also went and gave the head teacher a hug.

Interior views of the Drummond venue

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The session in progress, Drummond

The children all sat at tables which had been pushed together to have their afternoon tea; both teachers and the three parents present also had their tea, chatting together as well as supervising the children. Immediately after the tea-break which ended at 2.47am, the group gathered on the mat for singing. The group then played the hide-and-guess game (the teachers first had to explain what to do and it took three or four trial runs before the group as a whole grasped the idea of what to do). The session ended at 3.03pm after singing and performing one last song. The children were instructed to clap as they sang, sing in a whisper, and then sing as loudly as they could; they obliged with respect to the latter instruction by singing with great gusto. There was also a brief discussion about next week's theme activities and notices for parents were given out requesting they supply a hard-boiled egg for their children to paint.

The afternoon was a busy and productive one for the children: by the end of the session there were a lot of paintings and other art work hanging up to dry; all children - even the toddler - had completed a finger puppet and several children had constructed objects (eg aeroplanes) at the carpentry table. (The teachers commented that there was a large proportion of $4^1/_2$ to 5-year-olds at this group which was one reason, they felt, why a considerable amount of work was produced by children during sessions at Drummond.)

The teachers left the Drummond venue at approximately 3.15pm after chatting for several minutes to parents who had come to collect their children.

Parents

Three parents remained throughout the session. All three helped with housekeeping tasks and worked with the children. They also supervised the one toddler present, carried out caregiving tasks such as accompanying children to the toilet, tying shoelaces, wiping noses, putting on and taking off aprons, pinning paper to easels ready for children to begin a painting, and hanging completed work to dry. They also chatted together and to the teachers, consulted with one or other of the teachers about the best way to work with the children, and distributed, from the group's own supply, library books to the children who wished to borrow one.

Two other parents were also present for part of the afternoon; they arrived during the last half hour and spent their time observing while mat-time and the final large group activities were underway.

Comments from the Teacher Diaries (31/3/88)

Best/worst aspects of session:

> ***"The best was the surprise when the children discovered the Easter Bunny had left a chocolate egg in their baskets. The comments were very funny and delightful."***

Other comments:

> ***"Some schools had 'teachers-only day' but it didn't alter numbers attending our group. There was a birthday today. For the Easter activity everybody brought a boiled egg to paint or, as Joshua said, 'a boiling egg'! There is a special needs child at this group - a four-year-old boy. He has behavioural problems and has been to see every psychologist etc around."***

LONGBUSH: FRIDAY MORNING, 25 MARCH 1988

The last session for the week was held at the Southland mobile pre-school unit's base location, an approximately 15-minute drive from Invercargill via State Highway 1.

Facilities Available to the Group

The Longbush group (made up of families from the nearby Dacre community) met in what had been until approximately two years earlier a two-teacher primary school. The former school was a quite modern building constructed of brick and wood; it was set within well-fenced grounds incorporating areas of concrete and grass, and netball and tennis courts.

As well as two classrooms, there was an administration block attached containing what had once been the school staffroom, an office, and a small kitchen - the mobile unit teachers used the 'staffroom' as their office.

As the mobile unit had sole use of the facilities, the teachers had been able to organise the rooms in the way that they found most convenient. One of the classrooms, therefore, was given over to free play activities while the other was where music, games, and other large group activities were conducted. As this was the mobile unit's base, the second room was also used to store equipment not currently in use at sessions. (The mobile unit's supplies were kept on shelves and in built-in cupboards and included, for example, musical instruments, dolls, wooden blocks, a train set, supplies of paper and collage materials, a Banda machine for producing notices for parents, crayons, paints, puzzles, books, balls, hula-hoops, and some small motor construction equipment (eg 'Torro toys').

The Longbush group's venue and the mobile unit's base location

The room used for free play, and for completing whatever theme activities had been planned for the particular session, contained a variety of child-sized tables and chairs (these had been collected with the help of parents associated with this group), a pot-belly stove with safety guard, blackboards, painting easels, several brightly-coloured striped mats, a sink bench, and open shelves and cupboards. As well, the teachers had set up an 'Art Centre' in one corner (supplies of plain and coloured paper, 'raw' materials such as boxes, straws, buttons, etc, and scissors, glue, staples, and sellotape were permanently set out) where children could help themselves to whatever they needed to complete collage work. Results of the children's creative endeavours had been used to liberally decorate the room.

The teachers liked to change the layout of the room from time to time so that, as well as variety resulting from regularly changing the equipment and activities on offer at a particular session, there was also the variety which resulted from making certain activities available in different parts of the room and/or from having the children work with familiar objects on different surfaces (eg on the floor as opposed to a table or vice versa).

The music-and-games room, apart from the mobile unit's supplies of equipment, contained a piano and a large floral-patterned carpet square for the children to sit on during mat-times. Both classrooms had linoleum-covered floors, lower walls of wood panelling stained in a golden colour, and upper walls painted in yellow or pale blue.

The Session

The teachers arrived at the venue at 8.53am, well before their appointed arrival time of 9.15am. As they were early, they were able to unpack the van and have the session completely set up (this included lighting the pot-belly stove) by the time anyone else arrived. Several children and their parents came 10 to 15 minutes before the session was due to start at 9.30am; while the parents chatted to the teachers the children began playing with each other and with the available equipment the moment they arrived.

Twenty-five children aged three years or more attended the session. (Two regular attenders were absent on this occasion.) Amongst this number were a set of twins and a 'special needs' child who was already five years old. (It was expected that this child would continue to attend the mobile unit for another term or so; although she was also attending an integrated special needs class at a school in Invercargill on other days, to do this on a full-time basis was proving too tiring for her to cope with in the meantime.) A toddler who had accompanied his father while he (the father) carried out some repairs was present for part of the session as well.

As explained on page 533, this group, instead of the Easter Bunny finger puppet activity undertaken by all other groups observed during the fieldwork period, painted and decorated hard-boiled eggs (although the teachers brought along a few 'spare' eggs, every child had remembered to bring along one of his or her own), and made baskets (using a portion of an egg carton and a strip of cardboard stapled on for a handle) in which to carry their decorated Easter egg. (The children were also thrilled to discover later in the session that 'someone' - they presumed the 'Easter Bunny' was responsible - had placed a chocolate Easter egg in each of their baskets.) Although all children present completed a basket and decorated an egg and one teacher in particular was kept busy helping them do so, in general, perhaps because the overall age range of this group was considerably higher than that of many other groups visited by the unit, the children did not seem to require a great deal of assistance. All other activities (including the sponge painting exercise) were the same as those available at sessions earlier in the week, although there was no opportunity to play in sand as there had been at one or two of the other venues.

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The head teacher spent time on a one-to-one basis with five children going through work completed in their homework books. One of these children received a homework book for the first time; the teacher explained what its purpose was and told her what her first task was to be - she was to draw a picture of herself and then make some paper cut-out clothes to stick on to the picture she had drawn. (At the end of the session, the teacher again discussed the homework book with this child and with her mother who came to collect her, and reminded her what she was to do - if she chose to.)

At 10.45am, mat-time was held in the music and games room. (This allowed the parents on duty to clear tables in the other room ready for morning tea.)

Mat-time began with the teachers showing the group the Easter eggs that someone had left for them (the children did not yet know that they were to receive a chocolate Easter egg of their own) and introducing the researcher and visiting senior teacher; the teachers also explained the purpose of their respective visits. One of the teachers then read the story about 'Georgie Grub', the child who would not wash. The story generated lots of laughter from the children. At the close of the story there was a general discussion about keeping clean and another on colour concepts. To follow up on the naming of colours, children were sent to prepare for morning tea according to whether they were wearing something "pink", "green", etc.

Children sat in groups at three of the larger tables to eat the snack they had brought with them from home and to drink their fruit juice (today, this had been supplied by the parents on duty rather than the children bringing their own from home as had occurred at all of the other seven groups). There was home-made baking for the adults; all adults present gathered near the children chatting together as well as to the children. Children who finished eating and drinking early spent a few minutes looking at books in the book corner while waiting for the large group period to begin.

The entire group returned to the 'music room' at 11.17am and, while the head teacher played the piano, the other teacher hid successive children under a blanket so that the rest of the children could guess who was missing each time. The group then spent the last 10 minutes of the session singing; this was something this group obviously enjoyed very much as they sang with great enthusiasm. While singing a song about going to the zoo, the twins were asked to hold up a large poster of all the animals that can be seen on a visit to the zoo. The teacher not accompanying the children on guitar pointed out each of the animals on the poster as the children came to them in the song. The session concluded at 11.35am with the teachers explaining that because of the Easter break the following week was a holiday (and, hence, there would be no session) and distributing notices to parents and completed work to each child.

Both because it was a large group (usually, 27 three to five-year-olds attended) and because they had sole use of facilities where there was plenty of room, the teachers felt that the Longbush group was much more like an 'ordinary' kindergarten than many of their other groups. The teachers commented, too, that having a greater number of children between four and five years of age than was customary at the other groups they visited also meant that the children were generally more independent, needing less help with the basics than children who were nearer three years of age. They further reported that many of the children played associatively while participating in the various activities (this was observed to be the case on this occasion); the children also kept very busy throughout sessions and there was seldom, if ever, any aggressive or disruptive behaviour evident. The teachers had also found that older children were often very effective role models for the younger children, with smaller children tending to persevere longer on activities than was the case when no older children were there.

After eating lunch bought from a nearby shop which provided some take-away food for (mainly) travellers, the teachers spent the afternoon at Longbush carrying out administrative and planning work, and washing out paint pots and other equipment.

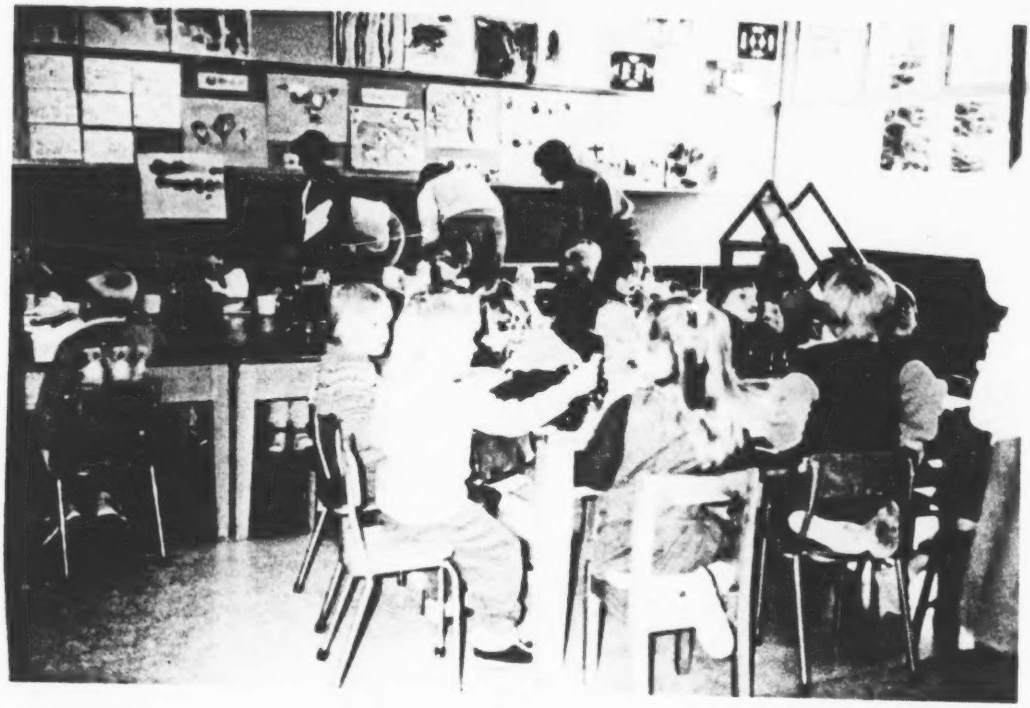
Parents and Visitors

As well as the two parents on duty three others remained throughout the session. On this occasion, the parents who had been rostered for duty confined themselves to housekeeping tasks - for example, preparing for morning tea, tidying up after the children, and packing equipment ready for loading into the van while the large group activities were underway. However, they also had time to chat with the other parents and to the teachers from time to time.

The other three parents who remained throughout the session spent much of their time before morning tea working with the children - for example, one sat with children in the 'Art Centre' corner, while the other rotated around small groups completing Easter baskets, decorating eggs, working with Lego and puzzles, and modelling with dough and/or clay.

The senior teacher was also present at the session on this occasion; she sat and chatted with various small groups of children as well as talking with the teachers, the parents, and the researcher.

Mat-time at the Longbush venue



Having morning tea, Longbush

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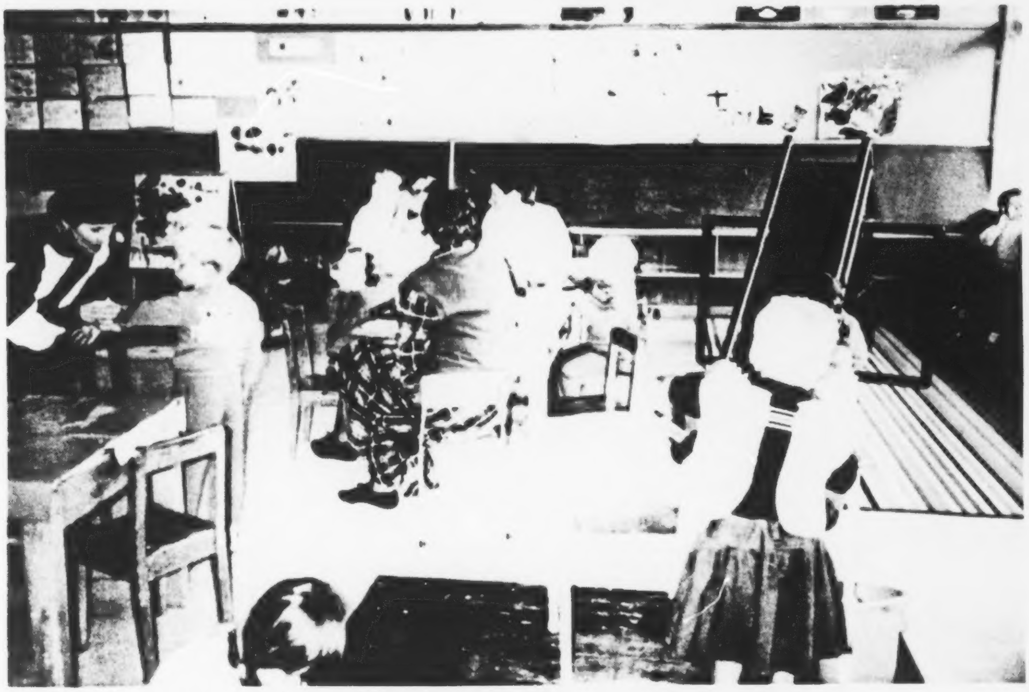
In the 'Art Centre', Longbush



The session in progress, Longbush

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One child's father spent about an hour at the venue, putting up some shelves and repairing an electric plug. When his work was finished, he chatted to one or two of the other parents and then, along with his toddler, watched the older children sing. (Two other parents - one of whom had just called in to collect her child - plus the senior teacher also sat in on the large group activities.)

At the end of the session, two parents helped any child who expressed an interest to select a library book to take home. (It appeared, however, that many of the children needed little assistance to do this. For example, one little girl - around $3^1/_2$ years - was observed to select a library book from a shelf, take out the card and place it in a pocket on the wall with her name on it to show that she was the one who had borrowed the book. She did this in a quite matter-of-fact way and without any assistance whatsoever.)

It was noted that the teachers had written up on the blackboard ideas for parents on how to vary the way they used equipment and activities when interacting with their children both at home and at sessions.

Finally, although the session ended at 11.35am, the teachers were still talking with one or two parents at 11.55am.

Comments from the Teacher Diaries (8/4/88)

Best/worst aspects of session:

> ***"The children made dough gardens today and were rapt to think that they could actually get to take some dough home! It was a busy session with lots of activity, but there was time to spend with small groups of children."***

Other comments:

> ***"We had morning tea outside. This is our biggest group so it's always busy. A lot of older children attend here - they generally spend longer at activities than groups with a majority of younger children."***

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> ***"We feel this group would benefit from having two sessions weekly. Have tried to close the Waimatuku group which is very small and come to Longbush twice a week but so far no joy with the District Officer [Early Childhood Education]. So long as there are five children the group stays open though Waimatuku children could attend the Waianiwa group or Riverton kindergarten. We will be watching numbers at Waimatuku - there are always people knocking on the door to get in at Longbush [ie there is a long waiting list]. We are going to apply for a third teacher. Might surprise higher authorities that this mobile is so busy!"***